MID-PACIFIC

BY JAMES NORMAN HALL

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JAMES NORMAN HALL

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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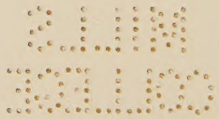

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TO
R.M.C., G.C.G., AND L.L.W.

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Mr. Wormley: Now *my* choice would be an island in the mid-Pacific. What a delightful place that would be for reading and writing!

Mr. Throckmorton: No doubt. But, my dear Wormley, do *you* write?

Mr. Wormley: At times — at times — mere trifles.

Mr. Throckmorton: Of what sort, may I ask?

Mr. Wormley: Oh, of any sort: fancies, little fragments of experience, and what not.

NOTE

On the beach near my little house on the island of Tahiti, there is an ancient pandanus tree perched high on its stilt-like roots as though for a wider view of the lonely sea before it. I often sit there of an afternoon, sometimes thinking of nothing at all, deep in reverie, conscious in a vegetative sort of way of earth and sky and southeast wind and of the faint thunder of the surf on the barrier reef, but scarcely more aware of my identity than the pandanus tree is aware of its own. At other times my mind is busy sorting over memories, or with reflections about some book I have just been reading — perhaps re-reading for the fourth or fifth time; and then my hand fumbles its way to my notebook pocket and before sundown I find that I have covered many pages with scribbling, illegible to any one but myself.

Perhaps I should let it remain illegible instead of neatly transcribing it on pages of manuscript. I can't say that I have been urged to do this latter, or even that any one has so much as suggested that I should. But it has occurred to me that an individual here and there might be briefly enter-

tained by some of these papers, and so I have gathered them together in this little book.

There is, I confess, one other reason: I thought that, if a sufficient number of individuals should be thus entertained, they might tell other individuals, and they, in turn, read and tell others, and so on, in which case I might eventually receive from my publishers the heartening news that — but enough. I have already said more than I should, perhaps. And I can truthfully say that this consideration does not weigh very heavily with me. Fortunately I have emancipated myself from the need of many material possessions or of the means for acquiring them. I have long since learned to estimate my wealth in the Diogenic sense — in terms of the things I can do without. And if some possible reader, after glancing hastily through these pages, feels that he can do without my book, let me assure him, or her, that I am the last man in the world to be either surprised or offended.

J. N. H.

ARUÉ, TAHITI
November 1, 1927

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MID-PACIFIC

I

OCCUPATION: JOURNALIST

I

I WAS at a loose end that spring, in common with hundreds of thousands of other men, most of them just out of the demobilization camps, with the ink on their army discharge papers scarcely dried. Day after day there had been a shrieking of sirens and a tooting of whistles in New York harbor as the troop ships returned from France. The canyon-like streets echoed and reëchoed with a confused tumult of shouting, and looking up, one saw tier after tier of blurred faces at the windows of lofty office buildings. There were parades up and down Fifth Avenue, regimental reunions, public receptions, innumerable addresses of welcome. But the most memorable sight, to me, was the line of soldiers filing eagerly in and happily out of every shop where ready-made, civilian clothing was sold. I remember vividly my own keen pleasure as I came from one of those places with my uniform in a paper parcel under my

arm. That chapter of experience was definitely closed.

It was bright, windy March weather. The days were lengthening perceptibly, but for all that they were not long enough by half for the enjoyment of the blessed sense of freedom one had. A week passed, and during this time I was as idle as it is possible to be. I rose late of a morning and had breakfast in my room. Then, with a book in my pocket or under my arm, I would seek out the quietest places I could find. Usually I spent the mornings in Bronx Park, and the afternoons in wandering through the Art Museum or the National History Museum. But it was impossible to find solitude in New York, and one wanted it badly after the experience overseas. I felt that I could never have enough of it now, even though I were to spend the rest of my life on some uninhabited island, a thousand miles from the nearest steamship route. 'I might seek out such an island,' I thought, as I stood in a subway train, tightly wedged in a solid mass of humanity. 'There must be many of them scattered over the seven seas.' I had some money — not a large amount, but enough to carry me to the other side of the world if I wished to go so far. The more I thought of an island sojourn the more the idea

appealed to me, and the upshot of the matter was that after many imaginary journeys, I decided to set out, in reality, for a period of wandering among some of the remote archipelagos of the South Pacific.

A friend, resident in New York, went with me for purposes of identification, to the passport office. Prospective travelers were lined five deep in front of the counter, for the great horde of souvenir hunters was already preparing for the invasion of the battlefields of France. The clerks were being harassed with questions from a dozen applicants at once, and had reason, I thought, to be out of patience and temper. My turn came at length, and a young woman, seizing an application blank, said, 'I'll make this out for you. Save time.' She did it very rapidly: name, description of bearer, distinguishing marks or features, place of birth, date of birth. I answered with alacrity until she asked, 'What occupation?'

'I haven't any,' I replied, 'unless "ex-soldier" is considered one.'

'What were you before the war?'

'Oh, various things, but none of them will do now. Can't you leave the space blank?'

'No,' she replied, 'I must write in something.' She waited with pen poised. A drop of ink gath-

ered at the point and splashed on the paper. She blotted it impatiently.

'Please hurry!' she said. 'There are others waiting.'

There were many others waiting. I heard behind me a nervous tapping of feet and several exasperated sighs.

'Why don't you put down "Journalist"?' my friend suggested. 'Didn't you used to write things occasionally for newspapers and magazines?'

'Yes, but only occasionally,' I said. 'It was never an occupation. I couldn't be called a ——'

'It doesn't matter; "Journalist" will do,' said the young woman, writing rapidly. 'Have you your photographs? The fee is ten dollars. Next, please!'

II

Several months later I was sitting on the deck of a sixty-ton schooner, eating a dish of rice and red beans. The schooner was called the Toafa. There were six of us aboard — a Chinaman named Chan Lee, captain and owner of the vessel, four Polynesian sailors, natives of the Low Archipelago, and myself. We were carrying a cargo of general merchandise to be exchanged among the Low Islands for copra and pearl-shell. The tiny

cabin was alive with cockroaches and copra bugs, and day after day for many weeks we had been sharing with them our rice and red beans. Nevertheless, although I was conscious, at moments, of a wistful longing for the flesh-pots of New York, I wouldn't have gone back there — not for any consideration, and at this particular moment I had only to lift my eyes to see, on the port bow, an island so lost in the immense waste of the Pacific that it may truthfully be called one of the authentic ends of the earth.

Its Polynesian name is *Hopéaroa*, which means 'The Farthest Land,' or more literally, 'The Very Last.' This is not quite true, however. Another crumb of land lies one hundred miles farther to the south. After calling at Hopéaroa, the Toafa was to proceed to this other island and return to Hopéaroa for cargo and a supply of rain-water before continuing the homeward voyage. I decided that an island called 'The Farthest Land' was far enough for me. Furthermore, I was a little tired of rice and red beans, so I decided to go ashore here and wait till Chan Lee came back.

All atolls are very much alike in their general features, but one never tires of seeing them, and it is hard even to imagine that places so solitary can belong to the world of reality. Hopéaroa was

smaller than most of those I had seen, and Chan told me there were about one hundred inhabitants. In shape it is an almost perfect circle, three quarters of it barren reef enclosing a lagoon five miles wide. Four small islands are threaded on the reef, the largest of them, where the village is, being a mile and a half long. Another, of about the same size, lies to windward across the lagoon. There is a good pass through the reef where the water shoals to three fathoms over a forest of coral of every conceivable variety of shape and color. We came abreast of it shortly after noon, and as the current was favorable, the Toafa was carried gently past two islets, on either side of the entrance, into the quiet waters of the lagoon. A cloud of white terns rose at our approach, fluttered noiselessly over the bush and around the tops of a few tall coconut palms, and settled again like scraps of wind-blown paper. We crept along with a light breeze, skirting the shore of the main island which was so narrow in places that it looked like a causeway rather than an island. Through the trees I could see the surf piling up on the outer beaches, but there was no other sound than this, and we moved along in the midst of a silence that seemed never to have been broken.

Presently, rounding a point of land, we came

within view of the settlement, and I was surprised to see another schooner, considerably larger than the Toafa, at anchor about one hundred yards offshore. The paint on her top sides, once white, was now a dirty yellow, blistered and peeling. The seams gaped; thick streams of rust extended from her chain-plates to the luxuriant growth of marine vegetation which covered her bottom. The standing rigging hung slack, and the ends of the springstay, which had parted, dangled from the masts, swaying gently with the imperceptible motion of the vessel. An awning made of bits of rotten canvas and pieces of sacking stitched together, was stretched over the main boom, and lying asleep in the shade of it was a native who looked as ancient and weather-beaten as the vessel itself. Another, a lean old man with white hair, naked except for a wisp of cloth about his loins, stood amidships, with his back to us, working the handle of a ship's pump. He too appeared to be asleep, for his head was sunk on his breast. Nevertheless he moved slowly back and forth with the regularity of a pendulum on a grandfather's clock, and a stream of clear water, its flow keeping time with his movements, gushed over the ship's side.

We approached so noiselessly that he was not

aware of our presence until the anchor was let go. At the sound of the splash the old man turned in amazement. The one asleep under the awning raised his head too, and both of them gazed at us without speaking.

'What in the world is this old wreck doing here, Chan?' I asked.

'Stay long time — hlee, four year,' said Chan. 'I come Hopéaroa once year. Always see old mans, pump, pump. No pump, go down below with fish.'

'Why don't they let her go down? That's certainly where she belongs.'

'She got *popaa* captain.' ('Popaa' is the native term for white man.) 'He say fine ship, only want fix up little bit. Bimeby maybe he get some money, make more better.'

'What do you think about it?'

'No good. Captain dlink, dlink, alltime dlink. Plitty soon he finish too.'

The village was quickly astir. The natives came crawling out of thatched huts scarcely larger than dog-kennels, and gathered on the beach. They were the most primitive-looking islanders I had seen in that part of the Pacific. All the children were naked, but the men and women wore European clothing of a sort. The

men were bare to the waist, with dungarees, in all stages of raggedness, for nether garments. They were a healthy, happy-looking lot, and it was evident from their excitement and pleasure that the arrival of Chan's schooner was a great event in their lives.

Near the beach, in the center of the village, there was one house of European style, covered with a roof of corrugated iron. Although not large as houses go in other parts of the world, it towered like a palace above the huts around it. The eaves were ornamented with a great deal of gingerbread scroll-work, and a wide veranda faced the lagoon. A faded French flag hung from a staff slanted out over the stairway. I asked Chan whose house it was.

'Flenchman, half-caste — got native mamma,' he replied. 'He belong government. Get dless up now. Bimeby he come.'

When he did come, the Toafa's small boat was lowered and Chan and I were rowed ashore. My host — at least I hoped he was to be my host — awaited us at the end of a rickety landing-stage. He was a man of fifty, a giant in stature, swarthy in complexion, with iron-gray hair and blue-gray eyes. He was dressed very warmly for the tropics in a double-breasted serge suit, a white shirt with

an old-fashioned 'choker' collar, a black derby hat, and yellow shoes. The shoes, evidently, were much too small for him. He kept shifting his weight from one foot to the other. The sweat streamed down his face, and the stiff collar had melted by the time we had reached him. There was something gentle and deprecatory in his manner, and his smile was so friendly and engaging that my heart warmed to him at once.

He shook my hand cordially and presented me with a card which read:

Monsieur Raoul Clémont
Administrateur
Hopéaroa

He greeted me in fluent French, but Chan having made some remark about my being a 'Melican man,' he immediately changed to English which he spoke with a quaintness I cannot hope to render here. I asked him whether I might stay at the island until the return of the Toafa, two weeks later.

'You wish to do so?' he said, beaming upon me. 'Then it shall arrange. You shall stay in my house. This is the greatest honor for me!'

Immediately he gave orders to one of Chan's sailors to fetch my things. Chan went aboard

again, for there was some merchandise to be sent ashore, and he wanted to get away as early as possible. I followed my host to his house.

The loud squeaking of his shoes seemed to give voice to the pain they caused him. I was relieved when he asked if he might remove them.

'Please do,' I said. 'It is a very warm day. Make yourself comfortable.'

He excused himself and returned a moment later, barefoot, but he had put on another stiff collar which melted at once, as the first had done. I was tempted to suggest that he remove his heavy serge coat, but he seemed to feel that his position as administrator demanded both the coat and the collar.

My arrival caused him an immense amount of concern, but he was so pleased at having some official business to transact that, clearly, no apology was necessary. He conducted me to his 'bureau' where he spent nearly two hours over the matter of getting me registered as a 'Temporary Resident.' He transcribed my passport word for word in his ledger, beginning with the 'Notice' on the inside front cover, and ending with the six abstracts from the passport regulations at the back.

'I wish to have everything in due process of

law,' he explained. So I waited while he wrote everything out in a neat Spencerian hand. While copying the 'Caution' on the inside cover, which tells what is to be done in case a passport is lost, he stopped and read aloud this sentence: 'New passports in such cases can be issued only after exhaustive inquiry.'

'Exhaustive, exhaustive,' he said, musingly. 'I have forgotten this meaning. But no! I remember! When I am tired I say I am exhaustive. This is true?'

I explained the sense of it and he thanked me with warmth and sincerity, as though I had done him a great service. Upon reaching the 'Description of Bearer,' he again paused and looked at me with an expression of deep respect.

'My guest! You are journalist! You write and write, and many people read what you write! This is the greatest honor for me! What journal in America have you the duty to be their author?'

'Oh, I'm not really a journalist,' I replied. 'As a matter of fact ——'

He thought I was being modest.

'But you shall be!' he insisted eagerly. 'Your Government says you are journalist. The *Secrétaire de l'État* of your great nation' — he turned for reference to the passport — 'insists that your

value be known. You are journalist, he writes. You must be safe and free, and have all lawful aid and protection.'

I wish I could convey an idea of the deep seriousness with which he said this. Had I been carrying a personal letter from the President of the United States, it could hardly have made a more profound impression than my passport had done. His belief more than half convinced me that I was a journalist after all. Of a sudden a new light dawned in his eyes.

'Here too you must write,' he said. 'You must meet my friend, Captain Handy. He has had a life of great deeds. I am sure of it! He wishes his memoirs to be written into a book. How glad he shall be if you will help him with his history!'

'Who is Captain Handy?' I asked. 'Is that his schooner lying offshore?'

'Yes. He is an aged man. We shall go to see him. He shall be happy.'

Nothing would do but we must go at once. I had, I confess, a good deal of curiosity to see the captain of this ancient vessel which looked as though all the waters of the Pacific had been pumped through her. What was he doing at Hopéaroa? I made some inquiries as we were paddling out, but my host merely told me what

I already knew, that the vessel had been for some years at the island. He gave me to understand that I should learn everything from the captain himself.

The canoe leaped across the water. At every powerful stroke of the paddle my head was flung back and I expected to see Monsieur Clémont's coat burst into tatters. We were alongside in no time, the canoe was made fast, and we clambered aboard. The old native who had been asleep when the Toafa came in, was now taking his shift at the pump. He looked at us with a worried expression, and said something in the native tongue, to Monsieur Clémont who hesitated for a moment, and then turned to me.

'All day the captain sleeps,' he said in a low voice. 'Perhaps he shall be uneasy that I speak to him now, but your coming is the great reason. He should know this. I shall try to be bold to tell him.'

I followed him down the companionway into a cabin as dilapidated and dirty as the rest of the vessel. There was a small table in the middle of the floor, heaped with piles of old newspapers. Glancing at one, I saw that it was the 'Brooklyn Eagle' of a date more than three years past. A tin lamp with a rusty shade hung above the table.

Against one wall was a curtained recess. Monsieur Clémont stopped irresolutely before it, then with the air of making a heroic decision, he put back the curtains, revealing a bunk over a chest of drawers. There lay Captain Handy, asleep.

He was naked to the waist, a tiny man, with a body incredibly thin and hairy. In fact his arms as well as his chest were covered with a matting of thick white hair. His head was enormous, long and lean and angular. His temples were deep hollows, and the skull was quite bald on top, but the hair of his beard mingled with the growth on his chest and reached almost to his waist. I could divine rather than see the long bony jaw beneath it, which looked even longer than it was, for his chin had fallen down and he was breathing noisily through his mouth. The skin was of the color of fungus, as though it had not been touched by sunlight in many months. I was conscious of a feeling of uneasiness as I gazed at this gnomelike little man. He seemed scarcely human.

Monsieur Clémont reached over to touch him on the shoulder, but before he had done so he drew his hand quickly back and seized it nervously with the other as though to prevent a second attempt.

'Should I awaken him?' he whispered, looking at me anxiously.

'I don't see why not, now that we have come,' I replied. 'Would he object, do you think?'

'Only once before have I done this,' he said. At length he called in a low voice, 'Captain!' There was no response. Then with one huge finger, nearly as thick through as the old man's arm, he touched his shoulder and called again.

'He's a sound sleeper,' I said. 'You'd better shake him, hadn't you?'

After a good deal of hesitation he did so, very gently, and immediately looked at me with a frightened expression, as though he had committed a sacrilege.

The mouth snapped shut, and the captain made a frightful grimace as though he had bitten into something nauseating.

'All right, all right,' he said with a petulant intonation. His voice was amazingly deep and resonant. It was hard to realize that so great a volume of sound could come so easily from such a wraith of a man. Then he opened his eyes, glassy blue and cold. The light of recognition came into them slowly, but once it had he quickly raised himself on one elbow.

'What's this?' he roared.

'Captain! You will excuse me? The Toafa is here. We have a ——'

With a great effort the old man got to his knees and grasped the edge of his bunk, and at the same moment Monsieur Clémont seemed to be pushed by invisible hands backward to the companion-way where he paused for the fraction of a second, gave me a frightened, apologetic look, and disappeared. The captain remained motionless for a moment, staring at the empty doorway, then the baleful light died from his eyes. The muscles of his face relaxed, his head dropped as though its weight were too much for his strength; he balanced unsteadily on his knees, then collapsed on his side and lay still. I waited until I again heard his regular breathing, whereupon I went quietly out. Monsieur Clémont was already in the canoe.

'Well!' I said, as I climbed in. 'He wasn't so happy to see us as you expected.'

He looked at me sorrowfully.

'I was too bold,' he said. 'In the daytime Captain Handy sleeps, and he is uneasy to be awakened.'

'Is he always like that?'

'Oh, no! You shall not think of him by this meeting. In the evening time when he has had

his breakfast, you shall see! I shall tell him you are journalist. He shall be glad. And he plays the zither. Sometimes he permits me to listen. It is beautiful! I am never tired to hear.'

Chan Lee was awaiting us on the beach. The breeze had freshened a little, and as the current was now running out of the lagoon, he planned to sail at once. He would be back in a week's time, or ten days at the latest, he said. We watched the schooner until she had vanished beyond the point; then Monsieur Clémont showed me my room. I saw at once that it was his own, but he insisted that I should occupy it.

'I have not often a guest from the great world,' he said. 'Not since eight years has a visitor come. This shall be a souvenir for me.'

'Have you always lived at Hopéaroa?'

'Yes. I am born here. My mother is of this island. But you have understood that I am of the French blood by my father? He was an honored man of that great nation. See! He is there!'

On the wall over a table was a framed photograph of a French naval officer in full-dress uniform. Despite his black beard there was a very perceptible likeness between this man and Monsieur Clémont. One hand rested on a pedestal and the other was lightly clasped around the hilt of

his sword. Across the bottom of the photograph was written:

A ma petite Manukura,
Souvenir affectueux de nos promenades sur la belle isle de Hopéaroa.

RAOUL CLÉMONT

Cap^ne^ de Frégate *Le 5 Aout*, 1875

'I wish to have known my father,' he said wistfully, after a moment of silence. 'His ship of war came but once to Hopéaroa. Manukura is my mother. She loved him but she heard of him no more. She gave me his name. But you shall see a beautiful picture of my father I have had made from this one. It is in my mother's room. Should you wish to meet her?'

I said I should like very much to do so, and he led me down a narrow hallway to the other end of the house. He paused at the door.

'My mother has lost her health since five years,' he said. 'Now she remains in her bed.'

He rapped gently, then opened the door and motioned me to follow. We entered a large chamber filled to overflowing with furniture upholstered in faded red plush. A brass lamp ornamented with innumerable glass pendants hung from the center of the ceiling, and the walls were covered with a great variety of shell ornaments in

beautiful designs and colors. But my attention was at first drawn to the bed where my host's mother lay, propped up by pillows.

She was of the finest type of full-blooded Polynesian, rarely seen in these days except on such remote islands as Hopéaroa. Her face was full of beauty and character, and it was easy to imagine how lovely she must have been as a young girl. Although now a woman of seventy, her hair was but lightly streaked with gray. It was parted in the middle and lay in two thick braids on the counterpane. As we entered she turned her head slowly, and her face lighted up with pleasure and surprise. Her son addressed her in the native dialect, explaining who I was. Then he turned to me.

'My mother says you are welcome here. You shall be our guest.'

She took one of my hands in hers and spoke to me direct, and although I did not understand, I was in no doubt of the sincerity of her welcome. She again spoke to her son, eagerly, and at some length. When she had finished, he said,

'My mother wishes to know if you have heard in other lands of my father, *le Capitaine de Frégate*, Raoul Clémont?'

I confessed, reluctantly, that I had not, adding

that doubtless I would have heard of him had I been of French nationality.

The colored enlargement hung on the wall facing her bed. With its huge gilt frame it must have covered twelve square feet. The cheeks and lips were red, the hair and beard a bluish black, the uniform a bright blue, and the sword, buttons, and epaulettes, gilt. Every line and wrinkle had been smoothed out of the face which looked like that of a wax figure. The inscription, too, had been enlarged, of course, and one might have read it from a great distance. In one corner was printed, in bold type, 'Midwest Art-Photo Company, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.'

Having returned to my room I spoke of some books on a shelf above the table. I was surprised to find on that remote island an edition of Tennyson's Poems, Coleridge's 'Biographia Literaria,' Jeremy Taylor's 'Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying,' and a volume of 'Selected English and American Poems.' All four volumes had been well thumbed, and a copy of a French-English conversation manual had been worn to tatters with use. Monsieur Clémont told me they had belonged to a missionary of the French Protestant church who had died at Hopéaroa many years ago.

'He was so good to me,' he said gratefully. 'He

gave me the lessons in English. Since then I am aptly self-taught. Every day I read in these books. I know how to say many poesies in your language. Should you wish to hear one?'

He then recited with fervor, many vehement gestures, and quaint mispronunciations:

'Come into the garden, Maud
For the black bat, Night, hath flown.'

It sounded so odd that I had difficulty in maintaining a grave face, but I managed somehow, and commended him warmly at the close. He was much pleased.

'Yes,' he said, 'I speak the English very well. But the writing I cannot. How I should wish to do this! Then I should have pleasure to compose. Perhaps I should help Captain Handy with his history.'

'Has he written much of it?'

'Oh, yes. He says it will be printed in a book, and he shall be a rich man when this is done.'

'Chan Lee told me that he drinks rather heavily.'

'It is true, he has too much of the drink,' he replied sadly. 'He had many barrels of rum in his vessel when he came here four years ago. It is still not exhaustive.'

'Did he have a supply of food as well?' I asked.

'No, he had forgotten to bring this. It has been my duty to ——'

He broke off abruptly, as though he had said more than he meant to say. Then he went on to tell me of the captain's zither playing which was so beautiful that he sometimes wept to hear it. I asked no further questions, but as Monsieur Clémont was the storekeeper as well as the administrator at Hopéaroa, I concluded that he had been furnishing the captain with food, and judging by the appearance of the schooner and the length of time she had been there, he had not been paid for it. I was more than ever convinced of this later in the evening when, at my host's suggestion, I took a walk to the far end of the island. I had not been gone long when I saw a small fleet of canoes stealing out from the village to the schooner. When they came alongside I heard the captain's booming voice, 'What's this? My supplies?' I was sure, then, that my host had wished to send the captain, unobserved, some of the provisions he had received by the Toafa. If he had been doing that for four years, it seemed to me that he was paying rather heavily for the captain's zither playing, however ravishing that might be.

I went on to the extremity of the island, and it

was late before I returned to the village. Light was streaming from the port-holes of Captain Handy's schooner. I listened intently for the sound of music, but all I heard was the faint creaking of the pump and the rhythmical splash of water over the side. In the settlement there was much coming and going. The natives stood in a line before Monsieur Clémont's store, a small building adjoining his house, and he was hard at work passing out the newly arrived provisions.

'My guest!' he exclaimed. 'I have searched for you. I have seen Captain Handy. He wishes to greet you.'

'Has he come ashore?'

'Oh, no. He comes not often to the land. But I have told him you are journalist. He is pleased. He wishes to offer you to prepare his history. Soon I shall be ready if you will go.'

'Wouldn't it be better to wait until to-morrow?' I suggested. 'I'm rather tired to-night.'

He regarded me with an expression of compassion.

'Of course! You wish for your sleep. Well, to-morrow evening we will go. Now you retire to your bed.'

But I was not really sleepy, so I said I would wait until he had finished his work. It was inter-

esting to watch the crowd of natives pressing eagerly forward for supplies. Case after case of bully beef was disposed of. The mere sight of those familiar tins with their familiar labels, 'Hellaby's Corned Beef,' 'Armour & Company,' etc., made me feel squeamish at the stomach. It brought back the very feel of the war, and a vivid recollection of the rending roar of nine-inch shells, the smell of lyddite, gas, decaying human flesh. I remembered the peculiar odor of trenches and damp dugouts filled with unwashed men. No ex-soldier, surely, can ever again look with complacency at a tin of beef.

The expression of anticipation on the faces of Monsieur Clémont's customers convinced me that there were no ex-soldiers at Hopéaroa. But it was not only beef they craved. Four already emptied casks testified to the demand for sour pickles. I saw one old man eat a quart of them within five minutes, whereupon he ordered a fresh supply which he carried outside. No money changed hands, nor was there any bookkeeping. Monsieur Clémont told me there was no need to keep a record of his sales. Every one knew what he had bought and would pay for his purchases in copra before the return of Chan Lee's schooner.

'I keep store only these few days each year

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when the Toafa comes,' he explained. 'Then no more food. All is finished.'

Certainly an immense amount of it was being finished on this first evening. Soon the whole settlement had gathered around fires of coconut husks in the vicinity of the store. I never again expect to see a beef-and-pickle orgy to be compared with this one. Empty tins were scattered everywhere. Some of the natives, having eaten to repletion, were lying with their heads pillowed on their arms, asleep. Others who had overestimated their capacity for sour pickles, were sitting cross-legged, rocking back and forth, groaning with faint dolefulness. But their misery had not the slightest deterrent effect upon those whose pickles were yet to be consumed. Monsieur Clémont himself was not at all alarmed. The same thing happened each year, he said, upon the arrival of the Toafa.

'They like so much these delicacies, and they are not useted to them. Always afterward there are stomach pains.'

He left me at the door of my room.

'Good-night,' he said. 'I hope you shall sleep with comfort.'

And as I had eaten but a fragment of one pickle, I did sleep soundly until morning.

III

As a matter of fact I didn't awake until nine o'clock. My host had slipped a note under my door. 'Good-morning!' it read. 'Your coffee shall be waiting for you when you wish it. You shall find me at my store.' And there it was I found him a few moments later. He had just opened another packing-case, and had arranged along his counter a dozen large funeral wreaths of imitation flowers made of colored glass beads strung on wire framework — the kind one saw during the war in every French cemetery back of the trenches. Evidently the holocaust of 1914–18 had not fulfilled the expectations of the makers of such equipment, and the surplus stocks were being disposed of wherever a market for them could be found. All the wreaths bore ornate beaded inscriptions twined among the flowers: 'Mort Pour La France,' 'Mort Pour La Patrie,' and the like. Monsieur Clémont stood before them, lost in admiration.

'These shall be so beautiful in our cemetery,' he said. He carried one to the doorway to examine it under a better light, but immediately he turned to me with an exclamation of astonishment.

'My guest! Captain Handy is coming! Never he visits the land since long time! He wishes to greet you!'

He stuffed the funeral wreaths back in their box, moved it to one side, brought out another chair and placed a small table beside it. Then, excusing himself, he hurried over to his house and returned with a pitcher of water and two tumblers which he placed on the table. Meanwhile the captain, who was being rowed ashore by one of his retainers, had almost reached the wharf.

'Way enough!' he roared, and then, 'Stern all!' as though in command of at least a dozen rowers. The old native backed gently on his oars and made fast at the end of the pier. The captain climbed the ladder, and with the sailor following at a respectful distance, came slowly up the beach. Under an enormous sun helmet, with his white beard streaming out from under it, he looked even more gnomelike than he had the day before. Monsieur Clémont went out to meet him, but he waved him aside without speaking and entered the store. He gave me a nod, sat down, and with his hands braced on his knees and his head drooping forward, breathed heavily for some time, puffing out his cheeks as he exhaled. It was plain that he was all but exhausted.

'Warm,' he said at length, and again I gave an inward start of surprise at the deep, sonorous voice issuing from the corpse-like body.

I agreed that it was.

He turned his head slightly, and the ancient retainer, who was standing behind his chair, stepped forward and put a bottle on the table.

'Have a drink?' he asked.

'With pleasure,' I replied, and he poured out two half-tumblers of rum. He drank his own at a gulp.

'Well, sir!' he said, smacking his lips and sucking in on his beard, 'I understand you're going to make us a visit? This your first trip in the Pacific?'

'The first,' I replied. 'I came six months ago.'

'Hmm! I've been out here fifty-two years.'

'As long as that! You must know these islands pretty well.'

'I'd like to meet the man, white or kanaka, that knows 'em better. But they're not what they were. You ought to have been here in the seventies. Then you might have had something to write about. Our friend here,' with a contemptuous nod toward Monsieur Clémont, 'tells me you're an author.'

'Oh, no. Hardly that. I'm merely traveling. I've always wanted to visit the South Seas.'

He poured himself another stiff drink.

'That's right. Keep your business to yourself.

That's been my practice. I reckon story writers are like the rest of us — they want a free field if they can get it and no competition. Ever hear of a man named Becke?'

'Becke? Do you mean Louis Becke, the writer?'

'That's the one.'

'Oh, yes, I've read many of his stories.'

'They say he made a pile of money out of 'em?'

'It may be,' I replied. 'His work is popular in America. Did you know him by any chance? I believe he spent most of his life in the Pacific.'

'Know him! I've got the best of Louis Becke many a time trading through these islands. But I wouldn't have thought he had it in him to be an author.'

'His stories have the stamp of truth on them,' I remarked, 'and they're written simply. Readers like that.'

The captain snorted contemptuously.

'Truth? I can tell you more truth about the South Seas in twenty minutes than Louis Becke could tell you in twenty years. And that's what I've come to see you about,' he added. 'I've got an offer to make you.'

Again he turned his head, and the old native who watched his every move, placed before him a parcel wrapped in a newspaper.

'As I said,' he went on, 'I've been fifty-two years in the Pacific. I know it from the Carolines to Easter Island as well as you know the back of your hand. Romance? Adventure? I've had more of it in a day than most men have in a life-time. Well, the last two or three years I've been writing out some of my recollections. I've got 'em in the back of this old ledger, not everything, of course, but the most interesting ones. Now, then, what I want you to do is this: take this book, read it over, print it out for me on your writing machine on nice paper, put in any fancy work you want to about waving palms and blue lagoons, and when you go back to America get it made into a proper book for me. Here's a chance you won't have again in your whole life. It'll sell, you needn't worry about that, and I'll go halves with you. We'll split fifty-fifty. How's that? Fair enough?'

I tried to excuse myself, but it was useless. He thought I was merely holding out for better terms. By that time he had more than half emptied the rum bottle, and he went on at great length to assure me that I should have little to do

except to make a fair copy of his manuscript and carry it to some publisher.

'It's all there,' he said, laying his hand on the parcel; 'and better as it stands than any story Louis Becke ever wrote. Wait till you read it! Man! there's a fortune in it! But mind! I want my share! I'll go fifty-fifty and not a penny above it!'

'It's not that,' I explained again, and so it went on. I was astonished to see that frail old man — he looked as though he might drop dead at any moment — carry his liquor so well. I had had but the one drink. He alone finished the rest of the bottle, and the only apparent effect was to make him more loquacious and argumentative, to accentuate the bell-like quality of his voice, and to deepen his conviction, both that he had a masterpiece here and that I wanted the lion's share of the proceeds from the sale of it. At last I agreed to read it. He pushed the parcel across the table, and keeping his hand on it, drew down his eyebrows and regarded me suspiciously.

'I can trust you?' he asked.

'You'll have to,' I replied, 'if you leave it with me.'

He weighed the matter and decided that the risk must be taken. Then he tried to pour himself

another drink. Noticing that the bottle was empty, he rose.

'Time to go aboard,' he said.

He grasped the corner of the table, swaying slightly. The ancient retainer gave him his helmet, and made a timid offer of assistance, but the captain threw off his arm and walked gingerly to the door. I watched with concern as he went along the rickety wharf and down the ladder to his skiff. He managed it without accident, however, took the tiller, and ordered his oarsman to push off. When halfway out to the vessel he turned with difficulty in his seat, and looked back, holding his helmet against the sun.

'Be careful of that ledger,' he called out. 'And mind! Fifty-fifty! Not a penny more!'

IV

It was then past midday and oppressively hot and still. Every one at Hopéaroa slept during the heat of the day. In fact, repose was the principal island occupation. The natives could lie down anywhere, at any time, and go to sleep at once, as dogs or cats do. After lunch, observing that my host was getting drowsy, I excused myself, went to my room, put on my pajamas, and lay down on the bed to cool off. It was a good time,

I thought, to examine Captain Handy's Memoirs, so I propped the ledger against my knees and opened it.

It had a bouquet like that of an empty rum keg, and there was no doubt that a great deal of liquid of various sorts had been spilled on its pages. It was redolent, too, of coffee, fish, tobacco, and salt beef. The memoirs filled about two hundred pages in the back of the volume, written in pencil, in a quavery hand. I began with page one:

FIFTY YEARS IN THE PACIFIC

Or

THE LIFE OF GEORGE C. HANDY

There's been a lot of books about the South Sea Islands and most of them are not worth the paper they're printed on. I ought to know. I've traded in the Pacific for fifty years as my title shows, and if anybody knows the ways of kanakas, I do. I've decided to put down some of my recollections, and reader when you've finished this book if you don't wish there was more of it I'll miss my guess.

I'll begin at the time when I was supercargo on the schooner Manaura that belonged to Wyatt & McClintock of Papeete. That was in 1872 when the kanakas would take anything you'd a mind to sell them and pay anything you'd a mind to ask. They didn't pay money of course they didn't have any, but they'd give you pearls and pearl-shell and copra which is as good as money any day.

Old Joe Cheeseman was captain of the Manaura. All we had for cargo was some cheap laundry soap, some kegs of salt beef, some calico and overalls, and about ten cases filled with bottles of physic pills. Well, this trip we went first to Tikehau. There's a good pass into the lagoon at this island and we anchored in front of the village. The natives paddled out and we said we'd give them two bars of soap, three pairs of overalls and six yards of calico for every ton of copra they brought us. We laid up there till we had fifteen tons then we went to Rairoa. That's a big island with several villages. They had a lot of pearls. We got a tobacco sack full, A-1 quality and all we paid for them was a case of physic pills. We said the medicine was good for anything from sore throat to rheumatism. We had good luck all that voyage and went back to Papeete with 70 tons of copra and pearl-shell and a cigar box full of fine pearls.

The next trip we went to the south'ard. We carried about the same cargo only instead of physic pills we had three barrels of rum and a lot of cheap mouth-organs. Kanakas are a lazy lot as everybody knows who has had to deal with them but when you've got something they want they'll work for it. In these days of course trading is nothing to what it was in the seventies and eighties. We loaded the schooner again in no time and most of the cargo was paid for with the three barrels of rum and five dollars worth of mouth organs.

I read on for a dozen pages, then dipped into the record farther along, and it was all like this. It seemed incredible that a man who had spent half a century in the Pacific, voyaging among

widely scattered archipelagos, should have found nothing worthy of record but his trading ventures. There was something awe-inspiring in his singleness of interest and purpose, which was to get as much as he could from the islanders and to give as little as possible in return. Occasionally there were such passages as the following: 'We landed at Puka-Puka and found a big pow-wow going on, singing and dancing and all that,' but no mention about what 'all that' was — nothing but long diatribes against the natives who could not be tempted at such times with laundry soap or overalls. I searched diligently for an hour, and the only passage I found to relieve the bleak monotony of the narrative was this:

When we were coming up from Manga Reva, Joe (Cheeseman) got sick. We didn't have any medicine aboard but I found one of the bottles of physic pills we'd been passing off on kanakas. I asked Joe if he wanted some and he said he guessed he could get along without. He got worse and worse and was out of his head a good deal of the time. He kept saying, 'Put me ashore George put me ashore' so when we came to an island not far off our course we took him over the reef in the whale boat and came within one of getting swamped. It was a god forsaken place no people on it. He was thirsty for coconut water so I gave him some. He kept getting worse and worse and the next day he died. Just before he died he said 'Don't you bury me at sea George. Leave me here.' So I did. We got to Papeete two weeks later.

I put the ledger on the table and took down one of Monsieur Clémont's English books — Jeremy Taylor's 'Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying,' but because of the sultriness of the afternoon, perhaps, the text soon blurred before my eyes and I fell asleep.

I was awakened by a knock at the door and was surprised to find that it was quite dark in the room. 'Come in!' I called, and my host entered.

'My guest! I have aroused you!' he said apologetically. 'But the food is ready.'

After a plunge in the lagoon I felt greatly refreshed and did full justice to a supper of delicious baked fish. We were in the midst of the meal when a note was brought in from Captain Handy, asking us to come out to the schooner that evening. He said he had something important to tell me.

We found him perched in a sort of child's high-chair at the cabin table, with a bottle of rum before him. He took it for granted that I had spent the afternoon reading his story.

'Well, what did you think of it?' he asked at once.

He awaited my reply so eagerly that I couldn't find it in my heart to disappoint the old man. So I said, which was true, that I thought it a remarkable document.

'Didn't I say so?' he replied, triumphantly. 'But I haven't told the half of what I might. That's what I want to see you about.'

Then he began a long account of some experiences which he now believed should be included in the memoirs, and I sat there, again marveling at his capacity for rum. I asked some questions, hoping to get him started on something interesting, but I might just as well have saved my breath. An hour passed and still he rambled on. Finally, Monsieur Clémont, who had not spoken a word all evening, said, 'Captain, should you wish to play on the zither?' I warmly seconded the suggestion, and the captain, after a moment's hesitation, told M. Clémont to fetch it from the drawer under his bunk. We waited while he tuned some of the strings. Then, tucking his beard more carefully under the table, he began.

I thought I was prepared for anything, but certainly I was not prepared for the performance which followed. At first he played some simple pieces, waltzes, marches, and the like, to limber up his fingers; but each number was more difficult than the one preceding. When he played 'I Dreamt That I Dwelt in Marble Halls,' and 'Listen to the Mocking Bird,' his fingers were all but invisible as they flew over the strings. Mon-

sieur Clémont sat on the extreme edge of his chair, tightly clasping his shoulders, and I felt little thrills racing up and down my spine. But 'Larboard Watch' was the most remarkable performance. He sang this to his own accompaniment, and when he came to the refrain,

Larboard watch, ahoy!
Larboard watch, ahoy!

his virtuosity with the instrument at the end of each line was truly wonderful. And for depth and volume, his singing voice surpassed his speaking voice. Indeed, it seemed miraculous, coming from a man well into his seventies, who was nothing but skin and bones and beard.

Had he continued singing and playing in the manner of 'Larboard Watch,' I could have listened with pleasure all night; but he soon became very muddled, which was not surprising, considering all the rum he had drunk. He tried a few other songs but made increasingly sorry work of them. At length he pushed back the instrument in disgust.

'No use,' he said. 'Can't sing an' more.'

Then he began calling me 'Joe,' and it was evident that he thought I was his old trading partner, Captain Cheeseman.

'You gwan with that bus'ness, Joe,' he said.

'Lot of money in it — both of us. I'll trust you, but mind you don't try any your monkey tricks! Fifty-fifty, fair enough, ain't it? 'Sfar's I'll go anyway.'

Presently his glazed eyes rested on Monsieur Clémont, and he pointed a limp, skinny finger at him.

'Hey, Joe! Wha's that kanaka doin' here? Owe 'im anything? Give 'im bottle physic pills. Tell 'im run along.'

His utterance became thicker and thicker, and a few moments later he passed out completely. He would have fallen over in his chair had not Monsieur Clémont sprung forward to catch him. He carried him to his bunk and covered him with a soiled sheet, tucking the edges gently around his shoulders. Then, having carefully put the zither back in its drawer, he extinguished the light, and the faint radiance of the last-quarter moon, streaming through the port-hole, fell on the captain's face, silvering his beard and the tufts of snowy hair at his temples. He was in a profound stupor, but he looked like some ancient holy man, sleeping peacefully after a supper of herbs and water.

'Does this happen often, Monsieur Clémont?' I asked, as we were paddling back to shore.

'Yes, but to-day is more unusual than before. He has failed his sleep.'

After a long silence he added, 'I should wish to play on the zither like Captain Handy.'

I supposed that we should see no more of the captain for a day or two, at least, but late the following afternoon he again came ashore. It had been raining during the early part of the afternoon, and having nothing better to do, I had been writing some letters to be posted later, when I should again be on a steamship route. The natives had never before seen a typewriter, and every one in the village had assembled in front of the veranda where I was at work. Monsieur Clémont was as deeply interested as any of them. He thought a typewriter a marvelous instrument, which it is, in fact. After watching for a while, he asked whether I would mind letting the others come up to see how it worked. I was glad to comply, so he lined them up and brought them forward one by one, to look over my shoulder for an instant. He made them keep absolute silence, and finding it difficult even to compose letters under those circumstances, I wrote and re-wrote, 'Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party.' I had covered three pages with this immortal sentence by the time Captain Handy appeared.

He thought I was transcribing the Memoirs, and was greatly disappointed to learn that I had not yet begun it. Being in an indulgent mood, I decided that I might as well make a day of it, so I copied his first chapter to show him how it looked in print. This was a great mistake, as I soon realized, for he came again the following day, and the day after that, and the day after that, always followed by the old retainer carrying the usual bottle. He looked more and more haggard and disheveled, for the loss of his daylight sleep and the increased consumption of rum were telling on him severely. Then a curious thing happened: the ledger disappeared.

We searched high and low, without success. I confess that I was glad. I knew the book couldn't be lost, and meanwhile I was relieved of the dreary task of copying it. But the captain became increasingly suspicious, and one day he accused me of stealing it. His opinion of his story, never a modest one, had risen enormously since its disappearance, and he really thought I meant to smuggle it away with me and rob him of his fifty per cent. I tried to reassure him, but only succeeded in thoroughly convincing him of my guilt. At last he made an official complaint before Monsieur Clémont, *Administrateur*.

His position was a delicate one. Here was I, his guest, and a journalist for whom the Secretary of State of the United States of America had asked a safe and free passage through foreign lands, and 'all lawful aid and protection,' accused of theft by Captain Handy, who had had a life of great deeds, and who played so beautifully on the zither. He informed me of the accusation with a delicacy and tact which would have done credit to a French ambassador.

'But Monsieur Clémont!' I said. 'You don't really believe that I have stolen his ledger, do you?'

'My guest! I should never believe this! But Captain Handy exacts you. I am *Administrateur*. It is my duty to accept his complaining. But you shall see! You shall be excused by due process of law.'

So he made out the complaint in French. It was an interesting document, but too long to be included here. I had the honor of copying it for him on my typewriter — the first typewritten legal document ever uttered at Hopéaroa. But to my great regret, before the trial took place the ledger was found. It had slipped down at the head of my bed and worked in under the mattress.

To prevent any possible further complications

I decided to make an excursion to the island on the opposite side of the lagoon. I took some fishing tackle, a light blanket, and nothing by way of provisions but some salt and a box of matches, for I wanted to see whether I could support myself for a few days something in the fashion of the islanders.

Monsieur Clémont carried me across in a sailing canoe. No one lived on this other island, but there were two or three thatched huts used by the natives when they came over to fish or to make copra. My host spent the afternoon with me, showed me where to find hermit crabs for bait, and the best places to fish. They all seemed best places to me, and the fish took the hook so readily that I saw at once I should have plenty of food. He left me at dusk, and I asked him not to return for me until the end of the week.

I had a gloriously lonely time, one of the happiest weeks I have ever spent anywhere. My only fear was that Monsieur Clémont might come back too soon or bring Captain Handy over. Fortunately, on the second day it began to blow very hard, and the wind increased steadily, so that it would have been impossible for any one to cross from the village island which was dead to leeward. It was an awe-inspiring sight, particularly

at night, to see the surf piling up on the reef. The great swells rose higher than the land, it seemed, and fell with a thundering shock which shook the little island to its foundations. I thought my hut was going to be blown away, and in fact one of the empty ones was demolished. Despite the wind, it was bright, clear weather, and I spent the days, and most of the nights as well, in the open.

On Saturday it fell calm again, and to my great disappointment I saw the canoe returning. I gathered at once from Monsieur Clémont's manner, that something unusual had happened. I was not mistaken. Captain Handy was dead.

It had happened three days before. One of his sailors had found him in the morning, lying on the cabin floor. He had been dead for some hours.

'It was needed to bury him at once,' he said. 'I should have wished to come for you, but this was prevented by the great wind. We gave him the funeral that afternoon.'

The old schooner looked even more forlorn than usual, I thought. The soul had quite gone out of her now, but one of the ancient sailors was still at the pump. I wondered whether he would ever be able to stop pumping, having done it for so long. We passed close alongside, and through the clear water I could see innumerable rusty tins

lying beneath her. A small mountain of them rose from the floor of the lagoon. It was roughly of the same shape as the schooner, and hollow in the center, like the crater of an extinct volcano.

'Monsieur Clémont,' I said, 'I wish you would tell me something.'

He looked at me inquiringly.

'It is none of my business, of course, but have you been supplying Captain Handy with provisions all these years?'

'He was my guest,' he said. 'And he was an aged man. This was my duty.'

He volunteered no further information and I did not press him for any; but as we were walking out to the cemetery, he said, 'Should you think I might have Captain Handy's zither?'

I told him that I thought he was fully entitled to it.

The cemetery was on the ocean beach, a quarter of a mile from the village. A wooden cross had been erected over the captain's grave, and leaning against it was one of Monsieur Clémont's beaded funeral wreaths which bore the inscription, 'Tombé Sur Le Champs d'Honneur.' We removed our hats.

'He was a man of great deeds,' said my host, gravely. 'He is sleeping now.'

I nodded, without speaking.

'Should you wish to continue with his memoirs?' he added, after a brief silence.

'Oh, I don't know,' I replied. Then for the first time I felt the prompting of what must have been the journalistic instinct.

'I wonder whether I could make something of the captain's history after all?' I thought. I had very little money left, after my six months of wandering. If I could write a little story perhaps I might be able to sell it to some editor ——

Then I heard, or thought I heard, a deep, muffled, sepulchral voice issuing from the newly made grave:

'Now mind! Fifty-fifty!'

II

ONE KIND OF JOURNEY

EMERSON called traveling 'a fool's paradise.' 'It is for want of self-culture,' he said, 'that the idol of Traveling, the idol of Italy, of England, of Egypt, remains for all educated Americans.' There is probably as much truth in this as in most general statements, but as I myself am a lover of traveling, I prefer to be more charitable in my judgment of other, likeminded people. I prefer to believe that individuals who long, at times, for movement and change of scene, experience the most natural and wholesome of appetites, one which they do well to indulge, if they can.

One evening, not a great while ago, I was seized with such a longing, and it came about in a curious way. I was walking along a lonely stretch of beach road on the island of Tahiti, in French Polynesia. The sun had just set and the sky had that serene and luminous purity which often succeeds a heavy tropical downpour in the midst of the rainy season. I went briskly on my way, enjoying the freshness of the air and the rich and varied mountain landscape, anticipating with keen relish the dish of curried shrimps and rice

which I knew awaited me at the restaurant on the Papeete water-front where I was accustomed to dine. Presently I came to a mango tree by the roadside, and halted for a moment to watch the mynah birds — there must have been hundreds of them — settling for the night in the dense foliage, and already engaged in their usual evening conference, which is so strange a thing to hear. This comes as inevitably as dusk, and as I listened to the noisy chorus I wondered what it could be they find to discuss with such volubility every twenty-four hours. 'Surely,' I thought, 'it is not mere idle chatter. It must have significance in the bird world which we humans try so vainly to understand.' The conversation was all but deafening. Innumerable waves of shrill sound mingled and intermingled, but occasionally one or two voices rose triumphantly above the others, and there followed a gradual subsidence of the full chorus while these particular spokesmen gave expression to their own views of the matter under discussion. Then one of the silent birds would take exception to some statement and the tumult would again become general.

I was listening with interest to one of these outbursts when of a sudden the island seemed to fade from view. It was a cold, clear winter morn-

ing; I was a small boy again, standing ankle-deep in snow, watching a farm wagon, heavily laden with husked corn and drawn by four horses, moving slowly up a hilly street in a little Iowa town. The breath of the horses came out in clouds of steam, and the driver, the reins buckled around his shoulders, walked beside the wagon, beating his mittened hands together.

'Hello, my boy,' he called. 'Better pull your ear-tabs down. If you don't, Jack Frost will be giving you a nip first thing you know.'

I was surprised and mystified for a moment at the suddenness and clarity of that vision which vanished as quickly as it had come. Why should it have appeared in a place so remote from Iowa and winter? But while I was walking slowly on, trying to puzzle it out, the cause was made clear — the mynah birds. Their shrill chorus, heard from a little distance, resembled very closely the sound of the steel-rimmed wheels of a heavily loaded wagon screeching as they turned over dry, powdery snow.

What curious creatures we are, all of us! And what trivial incidents lead us, sometimes, toward decisions which upset the routine of our lives. It may be that Emerson, too, had had some unsettling experience at the time when he set down

his observations on the folly of traveling. It may be that he was merely trying to exorcise thus some sudden longing of his own for other horizons, changed associations. Perhaps he succeeded; or perhaps, the spirit of restlessness growing upon him, he threw down his pen in disgust, seized his hat and stick, walked as far as Walden Pond and back, and called it a journey. This attempt at self-deception failing, in a petulant mood he again seated himself at his desk to disparage his fellow countrymen who gave scope to their love of wandering. Well, we know what he wrote, but we shall never know what all of his thoughts were at this writing, and there must be errant, undisciplined thoughts to pester philosophers as well as other men, thumbing their noses, so to speak, at those which are given form and substance and such an air of final judgment on pages of manuscript. 'What about us?' they shout derisively, and they whistle and hoot and cat-call like a crowd of gamins in a peanut gallery — 'Hey, mister! What about us?' But sages, from the very nature of their calling, must be cautious men, and so that discordant outcry, however deafening it may be within the walls of their book-lined studies, never reaches the ears of the outside world.

But to continue, had I been content merely to recognize the identity of sound between a nightly chorus of mynah birds and the complaining of steel-rimmed wheels over dry snow, perhaps I should not have started on my journey at all. But I was greatly pleased with the immediacy of the recognition, and such a throng of boyhood memories came crowding back in the train of it, that I sat down on the beach the better to enjoy them; and the result was an overwhelming desire to leave the South Seas. Now love of wandering — largely, I confess, for its own sake — has kept me all these years as poor as Job's turkey. I had thought I was rid of it at last, having remained at Tahiti for nearly a year without once wishing to go elsewhere. But here it was again, in another guise, for I found that I was longing, not so much for new horizons as for those which had ringed me round in boyhood. I wanted to make a sentimental journey to a little, back-country, middle-western town which has for me many happy associations. I sprang up, hoping to outdistance the yearning by mere physical movement, but it walked apace with me and was still abreast when I reached the restaurant in Papeete. Dinner was in progress, and Mr. Mitchner, the proprietor — a Frenchman by

naturalization, born in England, of German parents — was moving among the tables exchanging gossip with his guests.

'You're late this evening,' he said as I took my seat. 'I thought you weren't coming and the curried shrimps are all gone.'

At another time this would have been a disappointment, but I had just lost my appetite for curried shrimps. I found that I was longing, as only a northerner can who has had a winter vision under a mango tree, for buckwheat cakes and maple syrup. How many years had passed since I had enjoyed that most delectable of cold-weather dishes? I couldn't remember, but I found a melancholy pleasure in thinking of it, and I did some of my thinking aloud, in the presence of Mr. Mitchner. I described how they were made, and assured him that there was no place in the world where the art of mixing and baking them had reached such perfection as in a small town I could name in the upland prairie country of Iowa. He listened with a show of interest, and when I had finished, he said:

'I know what's the matter with you — you're homesick.'

I admitted that this was true.

'Well, why don't you go home, then, if you're

so hungry for buckwheat cakes? We can't supply you here, that's certain.'

He left me to attend to some matter in the kitchen, while I ate, without relish, a dish of *poisson mayonnaise.* I noticed a young man seated at a near-by table, his supper untasted before him. He was writing in a notebook. It was fascinating to watch him, he was so deeply absorbed, so wholly oblivious to everything around him. His eyes sparkled with interest and he smiled to himself as he wrote. Now and then he paused to gaze through the window across the lagoon to the island of Moorea, fifteen miles away, whose jagged peaks were still faintly outlined against the afterglow. Evidently he was a stranger at Papeete, some traveler but recently arrived. I envied him the freshness of his impressions, and remembered my own keen pleasure when I had first set foot in this tropical island world.

Mr. Mitchner returned from the kitchen and sat down with a sigh of weariness in the chair opposite mine. I called his attention to the young man in the corner.

'Yes,' he said, lowering his voice. 'He seems to be enjoying himself, doesn't he? What do you suppose he finds to write about, letting his dinner

get cold, that way? Some one told me that he is Hilaire Belloc's son — you know, the English author. I've heard that his father has sent him on his own, without a penny, to see the world. He must earn his way as he goes. Now that's what I call a sound plan for a young man's education, a heap better than sending him to college in a motor car. But of course you must know your son. He must have the right kind of stuff in him.'

This young man had, I thought. Traveling would do him nothing but good. I wished that his father might have looked in on him at that moment.

'You know,' said Mr. Mitchner, after a brief silence; 'your speaking of buckwheat cakes reminds me of an Englishman I once knew in the Solomon Islands. It's odd what a man will do, sometimes, when he gets hungry for home cooking. This man was taken about the way you've been, but what he wanted was a dish of apple tart and cream. So what did he do but go all the way home to Devonshire to get it! That's as true as I'm sitting here talking to you. I knew him very well. When he came back, eight months later, he brought a wife with him, but what he went for was the apple tart. He was a sorry man, though, about

a year afterward. His wife was a regular shrew. That's the trouble with journeys. They never turn out the way you expect them to. But if you really want to go to America,' he added, 'you can, you know. There's the Jeanne d'Arc: she's sailing to-morrow.'

It often happens thus when the itch for wandering comes. The irritation spreads with amazing rapidity. Everything seems to add to it. A young man writing up his travel diary at a table, ignorant of your very existence, scatters further contagion as a dynamo scatters sparks, and a hotel proprietor, with complete indifference to his own practical interests, says, 'There's the Jeanne d'Arc: she's sailing to-morrow.'

Having finished my dinner I walked resolutely away from the water-front, along the road leading inland toward the mountains, but at every cross-road I was aware of a smell, an odor, or better, of innumerable, mingled odors, something less than fragrance, perhaps, but very pleasant for all that — the unmistakable bouquet of a four-thousand-ton tramp steamer, homeward bound after a long voyage in the tropics. The attempt to ignore it was futile. I was drawn toward it with irresistible attractive force, and, a few moments later, found myself standing in

the darkness of the after-deck of the Jeanne d'Arc. Mr. Mitchner had told me that she was bound ultimately to Marseilles, but she was first to stop at the Marquesas, going thence, via Panama, to Baltimore and New York before proceeding to France.

The sailors had been given shore leave for the evening, and all was silent aboard. I saw a light burning over a passageway, and entering, I came to a door with the lettering, 'Commandant,' over it. It was a quite ordinary, varnished cabin door, with a brass knob in need of burnishing. It was hard even to imagine that it might open upon America. Nevertheless I knocked, a voice said, '*Entrez!*' and the following afternoon, Mr. Mitchner, who was standing in the doorway of his restaurant, made a trumpet of his hands and called across a widening strip of water, 'I hope you enjoy your buckwheat cakes!'

I hoped so, too, but I didn't enjoy them because I didn't have them. The Pacific is wide, and tramps the most leisurely of steamers. As for the Jeanne d'Arc, she was nearly a year from home; her bottom was covered with a wonderful growth of marine vegetation, and every variety of ship-loving mollusc which tropical seas afford. Days passed, weeks passed, months passed. We

moved eastward across that lonely and seemingly interminable ocean with the deliberation of a scow laden with cement. By the time we reached Baltimore, where I went ashore, tulips were in bloom. I knew by that sign that there would be no more buckwheat cakes until next winter, so I proceeded westward by leisurely stages, and it was early summer before I crossed the Mississippi into Iowa.

The town of Riverview is not an easy place to reach even in these days. You must take a local train from Des Moines, change again at Orchard Valley and go on by a branch line. In my boyhood there had been but one train daily between Orchard Valley and Riverview. It came down in the morning to meet the east- and westbound trains on the main line, and returned in the late afternoon after the arrival of the Des Moines local. It was a pleasant surprise to find the old schedule unchanged after so many years. As for the train itself — a baggage-coach and day-coach drawn by a small engine with a flanged smoke-stack — it was precisely as I had remembered it.

There were few passengers that afternoon — no one I knew; but Mr. Frey, the conductor, I recognized at once. Even as a boy he had seemed

old to me, although he could not then have been more than thirty. He punched my ticket three times, in the old, deliberate manner which had such fascination in the days when it was my dream to become the conductor of a passenger train.

'Don't you remember me, Mr. Frey?' I asked.

He lowered his chin and gazed at me over the rim of his spectacles.

'No,' he said, after a brief scrutiny; 'no, I reckon I ought to but I can't say I do. Wait a minute! You're not one of the Channing boys, are you?'

'That's very close,' I replied. 'They're my cousins. We used to come to Riverview every summer and at Christmas time to visit our Aunt Martha — Mrs. Martha Colby.' Then I gave him my name.

'Well, I'll declare! Sure enough I remember you now! But you've grown clean out of knowledge. That mustache changes you more than you might think.'

A moment later when he had finished collecting the tickets he sat down beside me for a chat.

'Yessir! That mustache makes a big difference. I recollect the time when you didn't have even the promise of one. Seems to me like it wasn't no longer ago than yesterday that you

came into George Shipley's barber-shop for your first shave. Jaspar Willis and me was there — remember? — and after you got out of the chair, Jaspar said, "Well, I never saw such a change in a boy in all my born days! You must feel a lot better, sonny, to get rid of all them whiskers," and you went out of the shop mad as a hornet.'

He chuckled reminiscently.

'How long's it been since you was back here?'

'Fifteen years this summer.'

'Has it now! As long as that? I wouldn't have thought it. You'll miss your Aunt Martha. She was a fine woman, one of the kindest and best that ever lived, I reckon. Lord! I wonder how many times I've carried you boys up and down this line? And that makes me think: here's something I'll bet you've forgotten.'

He reversed the back of the seat in front of us and showed me a deeply cut notch on the sill of the adjacent window. It had long since been varnished over and was blackened by soot and time.

'I think you was the one that done it,' he said. 'You boys was going down to Orchard Valley to the circus, and you had a brand-new pocket-knife your aunt had give you. Well, when I came along for the tickets, there you was, hard at work, as if

my nice new car — it was new then — was nothing but an old store box to try jack-knives on.'

The reminder of this forgotten incident brought back the very feel of boyhood, and scores of happy memories all but lost under the dust of many years. I was grateful to Mr. Frey who was not at all aware of the service he had done me.

'Yes,' I said, 'I remember, and I was the guilty one.'

'That's what I was thinking,' he replied. 'Remember how I blowed you up? I was hopping mad at first, but you know, that was the very day I was boosted to conductor, and afterward I thought, well, that mark will be a little souvenir of my new job, and I was glad then you'd made it. That's how I happen to remember it so well.'

'I don't suppose there's any chance now to get buckwheat cakes at Riverview?'

'Buckwheat cakes! At this time of year? No, you'll have to come back in the winter time.'

'Are they as good as they used to be?'

'Every bit. But say! there was no one could make them like your Aunt Martha. Many a time she's called me in for a big plateful when I was on my way to the depot. She was the best cook Riverview has ever seen or ever will see, I reckon.'

We talked of one thing and another while the

train, proceeding on its leisurely twenty-mile journey, past Oak Grove and Cherry Hill, seemed to be traveling through time as well as space, back to the very period of my boyhood. There was a meadow lark on every fence-post, and the right-of-way was even brighter with honeysuckle and Sweet William than I had remembered it. Looking out over cornfields and pasture land where the cattle were drowsing in the shade, I realized that I was as native to this country as a pignut tree; that for all my wandering my roots were still here, deeply embedded in the rich, black soil.

The train drew up at the same small brick depot, standing as of old at the edge of the open prairie. It was a pleasant and truthful augury, for outwardly at least, the town had changed very little. Picket fences and board sidewalks had long since disappeared, to be sure, and the hitching-posts around the square, but the same two-story brick business blocks fronted it, and the same boyhood smells of drugs, drygoods, groceries, sprinkled streets and freshly cut grass mingled in the sultry air.

Plummer's livery stable had been converted into a garage, but the old Willard hotel had withstood like rock the winds of change. Two commercial travelers sat on the front porch, their

chairs tilted back against the wall, as though they had not moved for a generation, and when I went in to supper, I more than half believed, for a moment, that the dining-room girl who stood by the window, one hand resting on her hip, the other lightly patting her elaborately arranged hair, was the one who had presided there when I was in knee trousers. Her hair had been bobbed, of course, but it required as much patting as of old, and she had the same leaning-forward carriage and slightly disdainful air. As she approached my table her cheeks quivered at every step, and that was just as it used to be. Then, with the well-remembered, far-away look in her eyes, she greeted me with the old formula: 'Do you wish beefsteak, pork chops, or cold roast beef?' I was sure of it then: the *genius loci*, changeless in nothing but its love of change in most American towns, had been as faithful as possible at Riverview and the Willard hotel. I could have ordered and consumed another supper for the mere pleasure of again hearing, 'Do you wish.'

But it was while eating, absent-mindedly, of a dish of lettuce, sprinkled with vinegar and sugar, that I shrank forthwith to boyhood stature. Illusion became perfect at that moment. Opposite me sat two of my cousins, the Channing boys,

with a third at my side. Aunt Martha was at the head of the table — we always came to the hotel for the Sunday evening meal — her head and shoulders mirrored in a glass over the sideboard behind her. 'Now, boys,' I heard her say, 'aren't you going to eat any of this nice lettuce?' It is a curious fact that, in that town where, with the exception of the hotel, appetizing food was the rule rather than the exception, vinegar and sugar was the inevitable green salad dressing. I remember my astonishment at discovering, long afterward, that lettuce may be a really palatable food.

Before leaving the dining-room I stopped to examine the mirror over the sideboard. It was the identical one which had hung there in my aunt's time with a wavery flaw in the glass which had so queerly distorted her reflection as she leaned over her plate. So I came away at once, and tried not to think any more of such imperishable things as mirrors.

I saw a few vaguely familiar faces during my evening walk, but only one or two that I could identify. Doctor Hammond I would have known at once, even though he had not been sitting in his rocking-chair on the sidewalk in front of his office. His hair and beard were snow white now, but he

looked as vigorous as ever, his eyes were as clear, and his face as kindly and thoughtful. He glanced up from his paper as I passed and said 'Good-evening to you' in his old courtly manner, but it was plain that he did not recognize me.

As dusk deepened into night old ghosts met me at every corner, old memories came crowding back, and mine being an avowedly sentimental journey, I gave myself up to sentimental reflections. How gently, I thought, Time has dealt with this sleepy little town! In what kindly fashion the years have passed here. In so quiet a place one would have an enviable sense of leisure; one's gift of life would seem an immeasurably generous one. Engaged in these reflections I turned into a side street leading again to the open prairie, and midway along it came to a house that had a puzzlingly familiar aspect. It stood but a short distance from the sidewalk, and was half hidden in shrubbery. On the front porch I heard some one rocking back and forth, back and forth.

I stopped for a moment, trying to recall its association for me, one which seemed to be connected in some way with my aunt and the Willard hotel. Then I remembered that we had often passed this way during our after-supper stroll on Sunday evenings. A family named Albright had

lived here then — a young man and his wife. In the first year of their marriage he had been injured by a tree which had fallen during a wind storm, and I remembered Aunt Martha telling us that he had been paralyzed and would never walk again. She used to bring him delicacies of her own making: currant jelly, cherry pie, a dish of peach dumplings, or strawberry shortcake. Neither the Channing boys nor I ever saw him during these visits. We sat on the front steps while Aunt Martha went with Mrs. Albright into his bedroom, and we could hear her hearty laugh and cheery voice as she tried to make them forget their troubles. When they returned to the front porch, Mrs. Albright, who was little more than a girl, sometimes gave way to her feelings. 'There, there, Nellie!' my aunt would say, patting her shoulder. 'You and Frank have had your share of trouble, goodness knows, but you mustn't let it get the best of you.'

Once I had gone to the house with all the small boys of the town, following Riverview's contingent of soldiers returning from the Spanish-American War. There were a dozen or more of them, just arrived from the demobilization camp, and they had been met at the station by the band and many of the townspeople. During the parade

which followed they stopped for a moment in front of the Albright house. The band played 'Just as the Sun Went Down,' and Mrs. Albright, who had come to the door, had said, 'Boys, Frank and I both thank you for this, and he wants me to tell you that he would have been with you in Cuba if it hadn't been for that tree.'

'We know that, Nellie,' their spokesman had replied. 'Please tell Frank from all of us that we talked of him and thought of him many a time. Tell him to keep up his courage. We'll all be in to see him, and if our good wishes are of any use, he'll be up and around again before he knows what's happened.'

Then Mrs. Albright had gone into the house, crying.

How long ago that seemed, as though it were an event in a previous existence. One's sense of time is so much a matter of personal experience that the Spanish-American War seemed to me as far away as the Battle of Hastings or the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers.

I was walking slowly on when I heard some one call through the darkness from across the street:

'Oh, Mrs. Albright!'

'Yes? Is that you, Mrs. Gaynor?' a small, plaintive voice replied.

'Yes. How is Mr. Albright this evening?'

'He hasn't felt so well to-day. This hot weather's pretty trying for him.'

'Of course it is,' replied the first voice with a deeply sympathetic intonation.

'I've moved him into the sitting-room. He's more comfortable there, by the west window.'

The rest of the conversation was lost to me, but I had already heard more than enough. I no longer thought of Time in the guise of a kindly old gentleman bringing generous gifts of years.

'Mr. Mitchner was right,' I said inwardly, as I walked back to the hotel. 'The trouble with journeys is that they never turn out the way you expect them to.'

III

K.F.I. — LOS ANGELES

On the chart the island was credible enough. It was indubitably there — every little indentation of coastline, all the details as to harbors, promontories, soundings, etc. And how often I had read of it in the narratives of the early voyagers in the Pacific! Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas? I knew it as well as one can know a place one has dreamed of a thousand times since boyhood. But somehow, from the moment of actually *seeing* it, further belief required an act of faith.

For I was not prepared for the quality of light which manifested itself on that particular afternoon. The sky was cloudless, and, as though it had been an opaque, impermeable yet viewless wall, it seemed to be stemming an eastward-moving tide of light, piling it high in aëry shapes of a color so palely blue as to be scarcely distinguishable from that of the sky itself. As I gazed I was reminded of a beautiful word in the Tahitian dialect — *ahinavai*, which means, 'distance rendering objects indistinct.' Such a distance still separated us from the land, and it was hard to convince

myself that the faint outlines were not of my own imagining. For an hour at least, as we approached, I more than half-expected that phantom of an island to vanish momentarily, and to see again the clear circle of the horizon where it had taken shape.

But it was the fact that we were approaching Herman Melville's island that I found it hardest to realize. Ever since my first reading of 'Typee,' in my twelfth year or thereabouts, Nuku Hiva had always been Herman Melville's island to me. I remembered ploughing through the snowy streets of a little prairie town, thinking of nothing but Typee Valley for days and nights on end, but it had never occurred to me that I should one day go there. And here at last was the island before me, growing more distinct every moment in the mellow, westering light, and I was sitting on deck, in the shade of a bit of canvas, reading 'Typee' again.

It was during my journey on the Jeanne d'Arc, the tramp steamer from Marseilles. She was always 'from.' The Pacific was really her home and she knew the loneliest parts of it. She smelled of tropical islands; she carried with her the clean, earthy smell of nickle-ore and chrome-ore from New Caledonia, of pearl-shell from the Low

Archipelago, of vanilla from Tahiti and Bora Bora, and the pungent, not unpleasant odor of copra. Her officers all came from the same village in Brittany, but they had seen precious little of it since the War. Eleven months out of the year they paced the bridge and the decks of the Jeanne d'Arc, the most leisurely of tramps. We rarely did better than a hundred and twenty miles in twenty-four hours, but their patience was as wide as the Pacific itself, and they seemed to have stared the very blue of it into their eyes.

The wireless operator was the only youth in the ship's company. He had served his apprenticeship in the Mediterranean, and this was his first voyage in the South Seas. The Pacific, he thought, was *triste*, too large, too lonely, and he longed for his inland sea where daily and nightly, he had been able to hear any number of radio-programmes, from Vienna, Buda-Pesth, Paris, Berlin, London. In the Pacific there was nothing, or practically nothing, and he had almost all of his time on his hands. He spent a great deal of it in his stuffy little wireless room, taking his apparatus apart and putting it together again from sheer boredom, or listening to occasional messages from far-distant vessels. 'I've just been talking with the Union Liner, Makura,' he would say happily.

'She's fifteen hundred miles away. Their operator says they're going to have a fancy-dress ball to-night.' In the evenings he would sit patiently for hours, trying to tune in on concerts from Australia or the cities on the California coast. On the morning of our arrival at Nuku Hiva, I tried to persuade him to go with me for a day of exploration in Typee Valley, but he had never heard of it and wasn't interested; so I set out alone.

It is a four hours' walk over the mountains from Tai-o-hae to Typee Valley. Never have I had a lonelier walk, for I carried in mind pictures from Melville's story and others of early sojourners in the Marquesas, and I had not realized what vast changes had been wrought here in three generations. The great and irrevocable change upon which all the others depended was Death. There were no Marquesans left, or almost none — in the entire group of islands there are now less than twelve hundred inhabitants. As for Typee Valley, I found a wretched little settlement near the sea, and that was all. An old native I met who spoke French, brokenly, told me there were twenty-five inhabitants. His father, he said, remembered clearly the arrival, in 1842, of the French squadron at the time the islands were annexed by the French Government. That was the summer of

Melville's arrival, and I recalled his description of Nuku Hiva as he first saw it:

> Toward noon we drew abreast the entrance to the harbour, and at last slowly swept by the intervening promontory, and entered the bay of Nukuheva. No description can do justice to its beauty; but that beauty was lost to me then, and I saw nothing but the tri-coloured flag of France trailing over the sterns of six vessels, whose black hulls and bristling broadsides proclaimed their warlike character. There they were, floating in that lovely bay, the green eminences of the shore looking down so tranquilly upon them, as if rebuking the sternness of their aspect. To my eye nothing could be more out of keeping than the presence of these vessels; but we soon learnt what brought them there. The whole group of islands had just been taken possession of by Rear-Admiral Du Petit Thouars in the name of the invincible French nation.

Melville realized, of course, that that was the beginning of the end for the Marquesans, but he could not have realized, I think, how quickly the end would come. I myself could scarcely credit the fact that it had come, standing though I was in Typee Valley, listening to a silence so profound that it seemed never to have been broken from the beginning of time. The old native beside me — he was a man of sixty or thereabouts, with iron-gray hair, a deeply lined face, and one leg horribly swollen with elephantiasis — was listening, too, it seemed. I wondered what voices he heard in the

murmuring of the stream, what pictures of other days were in his mind as he gazed into the green depths of the valley before us. Whatever his thoughts, he didn't disclose them. His hut was a little distance up the valley and he accompanied me that far, carrying on his shoulder a gasoline tin filled with *Poi-Poi*, the fermented breadfruit paste which has always formed a principal article of food in the Marquesas.

His house was the farthest from the beach of any in the settlement; the path beyond it was so overgrown in places that I had difficulty in making my way, but I pushed on, going deeper and deeper into the valley, seeing on either hand the great stone platforms, now overgrown with trees and bush, upon which the natives had formerly built their houses. As I scrambled over rocks, through the brush, and back and forth across the stream, I heard, occasionally, the cry of the *kuku*, a beautiful wood-pigeon, the only voice to break the silence of the valley. It is a lonely little bird, and its cry, a long-drawn-out 'Oh-h-h-h, Oh-h-h-h, Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh-oh,' dying gradually away, is almost human in quality.

At length I came to the place which must have been, within a few hundred yards, where Melville had lived. It is all but impenetrable jungle now;

I sat on a huge flat-topped boulder in the middle of the stream, and, having brought my copy of 'Typee' with me, I re-read passages in which he had described so vividly scenes from the life of the natives eighty-five years ago. I found it hard to enter into his feelings of anguish and despair as he thought of his remoteness from home and friends. If only he might have foreseen, I thought, what was to happen here in so brief a time, he would have wasted no moments in fears and forebodings about his own situation. What a record he could have made of the life of this finest of primitive races in the Pacific!

But the record he had made was vivid enough. The pictures that rose into mind as I read of the life in that once happy valley were in such contrast to the scene of lonely desolation actually before me, that I soon closed the book and gave myself up to my own reflections. It was easy to imagine that Melville's own spirit was somewhere in the vicinity — I heard his voice so clearly in the soundless way it comes to one from the printed page, and the voices of those old friends of his who had shown him such warm-hearted hospitality. I sat for a long time in that green, quiet place, listening to the music of running water, and at length I was scarcely more animate than the trees

around me which threw a grateful shade over my resting-place.

It was mid-afternoon when I started down the valley, and night had fallen long before I reached the Jeanne d'Arc in Tai-o-hae Bay; but there was a full moon to light me along the trail over the mountains and across the high slopes of the plateaus. At ten o'clock I was having a belated supper on deck when the wireless operator appeared.

'Oh, there you are!' he said eagerly. 'Come quick! I've tuned in on a California station — K.F.I., Los Angeles, I think! Clear as a bell — not a bit of static! And it's a wonderful programme! There's been an orchestra playing ——'

I followed him to the wireless room. He fixed on his head-piece and adjusted his dials, listening for a moment.

'Somebody's talking now,' he said, as he handed me the apparatus. 'You'd think it was right in this room!'

It was a woman's voice I heard, brisk, alert, and businesslike:

'. . . So much for sponge-cake. Now, ladies, I hope you're all listening, are you? Because next I'm going to give you some recipes for really scrumptious little desserts. The first is for strawberry-whip, for your luncheons these hot July

days. We all like strawberries, don't we? Well, this is a *particularly* lovely dessert. First, you mash to a pulp two cups of nice ripe strawberries and sweeten to taste. Add two teaspoons of gelatine soaked in a little more than a tablespoonful of cold water and melted. Then, whip to a froth the white of one egg ——'

I was not interested in strawberry-whip just then; I was thinking of Typee Valley, so I didn't wait for the rest of it.

IV

INDIAN COUNTRY

A TRAVELING salesman whom I met on the train assured me with enthusiasm that it was 'the best, busiest little city west of the Mississippi,' and perhaps it was, and is, from a commercial point of view. From any other, in so far as I could judge after a five hours' visit, it seemed to have but small claim to distinction. Indeed, there was nothing, not even a name, to distinguish it as a Western town, and a chance visitor, had he been set down blindfold in the main business thoroughfare, might easily have thought it a street in Albany, or Dayton, Ohio, or Indianapolis, or Los Angeles, or Atlanta, Georgia.

It was a busy place — there was no doubt of that — and growing rapidly; but to me it seemed mere rank increase without order or design, and one would have said that here dreary uniformity was something inherent in the principle of growth. It met the eye on every hand, and in the residence districts the machine-made individuality of the houses was even more depressing. Most of them, evidently, had been turned out wholesale by real-estate promoters. Dwellings of precisely the

same design appeared again and again, in street after street, and the same want of imagination was apparent in the public and semi-public buildings. The post-office was in the Colonial style and looked as out of place in the setting as the city hall — a replica, with certain bizarre concessions to utility, of a Grecian temple. One of the Protestant churches, an enormous structure of yellow brick, was flanked by two squat towers surmounted by green domes. What sort of men, I wondered, were the City Fathers who permitted such things?

Then it occurred to me that there were no City Fathers any more in such towns as this. Perhaps there never had been. The development of the country had been too rapid. Migration had followed migration in quick succession; the population was still fluid, and, like water, its only business was to spread, to fill, and, rising to certain levels, to flow on.

I walked for miles over stone-covered prairie where, within the memory of living men, the buffalo had roamed. The business streets were lined with motor cars and filled with shoppers. Caught for a moment in a cross-street crush, I overheard a fragment of conversation between two women just behind me.

'What'll we do now?' asked one.

'I'm kinda tired, ain't you?' said the other. 'Let's go sit in a movie.'

Having nothing better to do, I too acted upon this suggestion. The theater was well filled even at that hour of the morning, and as I glanced at the rows of pale, expressionless faces behind me, faintly illuminated by the light from the screen, it seemed to me that all those people, like the two women whose conversation I had overheard, had come there merely to sit. The film was an utterly banal one, having nothing to commend it but the excellence of the photography. Part after part was reeled off, and one longed and half hoped for some demonstration on the part of the audience, some active protest against such an insult to common intelligence; but the rows of pale faces showed neither pleasure nor displeasure, neither amusement nor boredom, as though the minds behind them were as blank as they.

I left at the conclusion of the fifth part and resumed my aimless wanderings. Here and there, on side streets, I came upon buildings remaining from the early period of settlement. They had an appearance of immemorial antiquity, but this, I realized, was merely by reason of the contrast with the modern buildings around them, and because

of the vast changes which had taken place, both fundamentally and in the externals, in American life since the beginning of the new century.

There was nothing, certainly, in the appearance of the principal hotel to remind one of pioneer days. It was a fourteen-story building with the date, 1920, on the cornerstone. Over the main entrance hung a large sign:

WELCOME TO THE INTERSTATE RETAIL CLOTHING DEALERS' ASSOCIATION! CONVENTION HEADQUARTERS

Being tired after my long walk, I went in there to rest. The walls of the spacious lobby were covered with convention signs and advertisements of clothing, hosiery, underwear, and haberdashery of all sorts, and a throng of delegates, wearing badges, were listening or not, as they chose, to a concert of popular dance music furnished by radio from Kansas City.

I bought a local paper at the news-stand and sat down to glance through it. It was the kind of paper to be found everywhere in these days, with syndicated news columns, syndicated comic strips, syndicated editorials. Even the local news struck me as being the same local news I had read while passing through other American cities on

my way westward. The Y.M.C.A. was making a drive for funds for a new building; a valuable property in the heart of the business district had just been sold; the mayor had extended the freedom of the city to the members of the Retail Clothing Dealers' Association, and so forth. I was about to lay the paper aside when my eye caught the heading of a column on an inside page: 'Fifty Years Ago: Items from the old "Weekly Gazette" for July, 1872.'

Frank Holliday has sold his holdings on the north branch of the Smoky River and is going on west. He says this country is getting too settled-up to suit him. Frank is one of those men who have to have at least thirty miles of breathing room all their own in order to feel comfortable. He's aiming now, he says, for the other side of the Rockies. . . .

A nest of rattlers was routed out from under the floor of the Plain Dealer saloon yesterday. The largest measured four feet, two and one half inches. Some of the boys played a joke on Joe McCracken, who was having a comfortable snooze at one of the tables in the Plain Dealer. They coiled up the dead snakes on the floor beside him, and when he woke up he gave a yell you could have heard all the way to St. Louis. Joe thought he 'had 'em again.' . . .

On Monday negotiations were at last opened up with the Indians of the Smoky River Reservation for the disposal of their lands to the United States Government. Colonel George Godfrey and J. C. Appleby, acting for Uncle Sam, met the Indians in the grove

of cottonwoods a mile east of town. They explained to the chiefs why the Government was making this request for purchase. Homesteaders are coming into the Smoky River Valley in increasing numbers, and it is only a matter of a few years before the country will be filled with settlers and the Reservation completely surrounded. For this reason, the Government, having in mind the Indians' own welfare, urged them to move to a fine site already chosen for a new reservation four hundred miles farther west, where they can live in peace and quiet.

The Indians, according to the usual custom, made their replies the following day. Most of them were firmly opposed to moving on. Chief Grey Wolf's speech, which is a fair sample of the others, was as follows:

'I heard what you said. I don't want to give up my lands. This country is like my mother. She has fed me and my children. When you moved us across the Missouri you said this valley was to be ours forever. You told us to build fences. You told us to plant corn. We did what you said. Now you want us to move again. It seems to me we have no home and you will always be driving us farther away from the lands of our fathers. We have gone far enough. I don't want to give up my lands. I want to stay here.'

While we appreciate the Indians' point of view, they cannot be allowed to stand in the way of progress. We hope, and believe, that our government agents will bring such pressure to bear as is needful for their removal from this rapidly developing country.

Under this, the present editor of the paper had appended the following note:

It is hardly necessary to inform our readers that the hopes of the editor of the old 'Weekly Gazette' were realized. The site of the cottonwood grove where this historic meeting was held is now in the very heart of the city and is occupied by the New Jefferson Hotel.

Luncheon was being served in the hotel dining-room, and the crowd in the lobby began to thin out. A bell-boy passed, calling, 'Mr. Goldberg, please! Mr. Goldberg, please!' with passionless insistence, and a man with a huge paunch and a shining red jowl, who was being massaged and manicured at the same time in the hotel barber-shop, raised his head and shouted, 'Here, boy!' Several commercial travelers were shaking dice and exchanging banter with the girl at the cigar stand. From a near-by alcove came the busy clacking of the public stenographer's typewriter. A telephone rang in the long-distance booth. One of the badged delegates who had been sitting beside me, waiting for the call, opened the door and took down the receiver.

'Hello . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . Hello! Is that you, Sam? Say, this is Charley. How's every little thing in St. Joe? What? Yeah, I'm down here for the convention. Look here, Sam, I thought I'd call you up about that ——'

The door of the booth slammed and I heard no more.

The Indians had passed on — no doubt of that. But it was hard even to imagine that they had ever been within a thousand miles, or years, of that spot.

V

A HAPPY HEDONIST

SEVERAL years ago there appeared, in England and America, a book called 'Isles of Illusion.' I don't know what its fortunes were. It must have found a considerable number of appreciative readers, and then, perhaps, it was sucked under and lost in the ever-increasing stream of books. If that is the case, then I am sure that it has been only temporarily lost, and that it will reappear farther down the stream. For 'Isles of Illusion' is an extraordinary book, and volumes of that kind have a buoyancy which keeps them bobbing up into the view and notice of patient watchers along the banks.

It comprises a series of letters written from the South Seas during the years 1912–20 by an Englishman to an English friend, and former Oxford classmate, at home. Most of them are dated from various islands in the New Hebrides archipelago; a few at the close of the volume were written from an island in French Polynesia. They were published, evidently with the writer's consent, by the friend to whom they were written. After reading

them one is at a loss to say which is the more surprising — that the friend should have suggested, or that the writer should have consented to their publication, for such intimate, revelatory letters are seldom to be found within the covers of a book, and I can think of no other instance where such a record has been publicly circulated during the writer's lifetime. To be sure, this writer's name is withheld. He is called, merely, 'Asterisk,' but any one whose curiosity prompted him to do so could have no difficulty in discovering his identity, and it must be known, long before this, not only to his friends but to many others beside. One would have said, judging only from the letters, that he would have been the last man in the world to have consented to their publication. Why he did so would offer matter for an interesting but perhaps not very fruitful discussion. The only important thing to be decided is this: whether they were written with a view to eventual publication. There is abundant evidence to be found on almost every page, that they were not so written.

Considered only from the point of view of the reading public, there can be little question of the advisability of giving the record a wide circulation. Rarely indeed do such letters find their way into

print, and I am convinced, after my third reading of them, that they will still be read when Asterisk is as anonymous as he perhaps thought to remain during his lifetime.

I do not mean to say that they are masterpieces of epistolary literature, but they have this most essential quality of all good letters: they are interesting. You may not like the man who wrote them — indeed, I could understand the point of view of one who conceived an active dislike for him — but I can promise that you will not suffer a moment's boredom in his company. What a gift of the gods it is, never to be tedious! It would cover a greater number of defects of character than those to which Asterisk so frankly confesses in his letters. He is not an artist at life, carefully shaping his destiny, moving steadily onward through good fortune and bad toward some desired and attainable end — there are few men of that sort anywhere, in any age. On the contrary, he is a chimera chaser, a follower after wandering fires, and he cares not where they lead him. He is also a born rebel, a kicker against the pricks of life, and has nothing but contempt for those who settle neatly into grooves and stay there, limiting their desires according to the dictates of prudence and comfort. Some of his letters are decidedly

amusing, but taken as a whole I doubt whether you will smile very often as you read his book. What makes the story valuable is the vivid picture it gives you of an educated, sensitive, fastidious man thrown upon his own resources in a primitive tropical environment. He was disgusted with modern life, modern civilization. He was sick and tired of England — he wanted to be happy and he found no happiness there. He wanted to be free to live his life in his own way, largely outside the conventions of gregarious folk. And so, with some misgivings and many sanguine hopes, he set forth in search of this freedom.

Of his life previous to the New Hebrides experience, we know the little his friend tells us in a brief introduction to the letters. His father, the product of an old-time grammar school, taught him Latin when he was five. He was then sent to a Wesleyan school, and from there to a local 'preparatory school for the sons of gentlemen.' Various other schools followed, and in his seventeenth year he went to London to be enrolled as a medical student. He had been given a lump sum which was to have kept him and paid his fees until he qualified. This he spent, apparently, for other things than fees. Then his father died, and with his money gone there was no more medical school,

but by that time he had a groundwork in medicine which was to stand him in good stead later. He became a bank clerk and afterward there was a long period of teaching as junior master in a preparatory school. A legacy received in his twenty-ninth year enabled him to go to Oxford where his pride suffered because he was compelled to associate with men seven or eight years his junior. His friend tells us that 'he took a fairly tolerable place in the Chemistry School. And so to the peak of his ambition at last — a mastership at a public school.' After teaching in England for some two years he went to South America where followed another period of usherdom and disgust. It was from Montevideo that he set out for the South Seas.

R. L. S. first turned his thoughts toward the Pacific. What an incalculable amount of disillusionment in other men Stevenson has, quite innocently, to answer for! I have read all of his South Sea books, both descriptive and imaginative, and I cannot find that he painted life in the islands in such rosy colors. There was a deal of glamour, of course, in everything he wrote about them — there couldn't help being. Stevenson found glamour, happily and rightly so, wherever he went, and the result has been that an army of men, most

of them young, some of them middle-aged, a few of them old in years but still young in hope, have followed him in his wanderings, particularly to the South Seas in search of the Delectable Isles. Individuals here and there have found them — they were bound to find them — but Asterisk is not among the number. There were times when he thought he had — moments when he was radiantly certain that he had. But always afterward came the reaction: he loathed with an intense and bitter hatred everything connected with the South Seas. It was the old story over again of a man trying to find the material counterpart of a dream. It was the old story, too, of a man carrying his own little private hell, himself, with him wherever he went, and fondly hoping that a mere change of scene would, somehow, miraculously transform it into a miniature Garden of Eden.

His choice of the New Hebrides was, to say the least, unfortunate. Had he searched the Pacific over he could hardly have found a group of islands less suited as places for white men to live. As a matter of fact he did not deliberately choose this group. An opportunity for going to New Caledonia came to him while he was school-mastering in Montevideo, and as it was a move in the right direction, he decided to take it. He went in

company with another Englishman who had partially persuaded him that they could both make their fortunes as planters. Asterisk had no desire to make his fortune; all he wanted was enough money to insure independence, and he was willing to sacrifice ten years of his life, if necessary, to the Mammon of Business in order to lay by a small competence. In one of his early letters to his friend, written on shipboard during the twelve-thousand-mile voyage to New Caledonia, he speaks thus:

> Brookes pesters me to death with elaborate figures concerning plantations and I pretend to be interested. I suppose we shall be successful but I don't seem to care. Sometimes I wish that I had waited and gone in my own way to do what I wanted. But then I think that perhaps the time might never have come . . . Brookes reckons that in ten years we ought to be making about £2000 a year. Then he is going to retire and live comfortably in England. Shall I have lost my faculty of appreciation by then? I don't think so. I am going to treat my inner self most carefully all the time, so as to husband all my strength, all my longing and love of beauty, and I really hope that instead of having deteriorated it will have increased tremendously.

One would say that this letter had been written by a young man. It breathes the very spirit of youth, and yet, at this time Asterisk must have

been in his late thirties. One reason why I find his letters so interesting is that they seem to be the expression of two men, one of them young, naïve, full of illusions, the other old and bitter and cynical.

But it seems that his friend Brookes had made a mistake in his arithmetic, 'a nought too many or too few or something.' When they arrived at Nouméa, in New Caledonia, they found that their project was impossible of achievement. The gains were slow and very uncertain. Furthermore, a large capital was necessary and they had barely enough money to pay their living expenses for a week. 'So back to the hotel to reconstruct our plans. Brookes immediately cabled his brother in Japan, and is off thither, via Sydney, on the 20th. I found myself left stranded, a waif in the great Pacific.'

Asterisk had better stuff in him than his erstwhile companion. He cabled no friends or relatives for money, but set out to look for a job. And he soon found one as a plantation manager in the New Hebrides, at six pounds a month, all found.

Needless to say I have already determined to accept. I have learned much about the New Hebrides. From all accounts they are worthy, very worthy, from the point of view of beauty — typical South Sea islands of

the stuff of which we have dreamed. There is a drawback, malaria . . . but I am not afraid because the risks are enormously lessened by proper care and a decent physique. Of course, if I find that it does make life impossible I shall move on.

He did find that malaria made life all but impossible, but he didn't move on. He remained in the New Hebrides for seven and a half years.

For an account of the details of his life there you must turn to the letters. I am interested not so much in his experiences as in his reactions to these experiences. I wish to learn how 'the happy hedonist,' as he bitterly styles himself in one of his letters, succeeded or failed in his search for beauty, happiness, and the free life.

The solitude closed in on him at once. You all but see loneliness flowing around him silently and smoothly, as though it were something tangible, like water. I have often wondered why it is that tropical solitude is so much harder to endure than that of the unfrequented places of the North. It is — at least I think it is. A gray, misty, northern sea with never a sail on it is nothing like so lonely as a tropical sea, bright and blue and sparkling in the afternoon sunshine. As for landscape, go to the bleakest, the most barren of northern lands, and you do not have there the feeling of forsaken-

ness which often assails you in tropical countries where Nature is so exuberantly lovely, so smilingly indifferent to your little concerns and worries. The wan mellow sunlight of the North has in it something consoling and friendly, and the sky seems not so far away. In the tropics it is otherwise. There 'high noon' is a fearfully expressive term. High noon it is in all truth — high beyond the farthest reach of fancy, and a brief, bewildered, groping glance toward that infinity of blue brings home to you, not intellectually as in the North, but emotionally, what an atom of dust you are, creeping under that brilliant sky. And when you seek escape from this overwhelming sense of littleness and loneliness by going into the depths of some valley, the damp sepulchral gloom and the utter silence soon drive you forth again. Yes, assuredly, one finds solitude at its worst in the tropics.

In Asterisk's case it was not so much purely physical isolation. Often there were other human beings within reach, but with a few exceptions he preferred unbroken solitude to their companionship. His was a spiritual and intellectual isolation, and one marvels that he endured it for seven and a half years. Probably he couldn't have endured it had it not been for his friend in England.

One is glad that he had such a friend to turn to. He poured out his soul to him, told him all that he was doing, thinking, hoping, suffering. He sent him voluminous letters at every opportunity. That his friend was a true friend in need is evident from the following:

If ever a man deserved salvation for a single act, you do for the writing of the letter which I received yesterday. I was feeling miserable, sitting at my tent door in the cool of the evening, gnawing my nails and cursing everything, looking lazily out to sea with no hope of seeing even a canoe. In the failing light I saw a speck, a lump on the water, an excrescence, mast sand no sails. It must be a launch. It must be Bernhardt, because no one else ventures up this wild coast. I got up and ran a good mile to where I knew he must anchor, and got there as he came ashore in his dinghy. He had got my mail, a great fat parcel of it — incidentally he had got my tobacco and I had been smoking 'trade' for a week — and there sticking out in the most obtrusive manner was your letter. I shook Bernhardt warmly by the hand (he thought I was drunk, as he was) and ran back to my tent. I had to be alone. I felt the envelope and it was so thick, and then (don't laugh!) I kissed it. . . . I opened and read solemnly and conscientiously my other letters — dull nonsense about surveying from lawyers. Then I filled myself a mighty pipe of Baron, mixed a corresponding whiskey and started to read.

I like to think that he had this great pleasure often, and only lonely men who live in the back-

waters of the world know what a pleasure it is. No doubt he did have it, although he sometimes reproaches his friend for sending him skimpy letters. But it must be remembered that his friend was living in England, in wartime. It would not be surprising if he sometimes forgot or temporarily neglected the happy hedonist.

Apropos of loneliness he has much to say, many vivid and memorable descriptions of his reactions to it. The solitude of the spirit which all sensitive men feel, at times, wherever they may be, was objectified for him. It was like a presence; it seemed to take on a shadowy substance and form and to follow him wherever he went.

> I fill my day as far as ever I can with the, to me, peculiarly obnoxious details of plantation life. But always there is the horror beside me, saying, 'when there is nothing more to do, or when you are tired, you will have no one to speak to. There will be nothing new, nothing new anywhere.' I rush out and stare at the sea and the horizon. I know every detail of it by heart. I know that there will never be a sail to break that ghastly line. And yet I stare and stare. . . . It is the knowledge that one is 'right up against it' that is so appalling; that one is bound to go on living this rat's existence for months if not years to come.

There were years of it to come, and as the New Hebrides are pestiential places, particularly in the rainy season, Asterisk suffered all the ills

which tropical flesh is heir to, with the exception of blackwater fever. A large part of the time he was dopey with quinine. He drank much whisky, partly for health's sake, partly to revive his spirits, and to make solitude more endurable. Weakened by recurring attacks of fever, sitting in his little 'iron hell' drenched with perspiration, tormented by swarms of flies, fleas, and mosquitoes, sick at heart and often too utterly weary to read, his thoughts went round and round in a perpetually narrowing circle with himself perpetually at the center. You may think as you read his letters that there never was such a colossal egoist, but that will be because you have never lived alone, in a malarial tropical climate, far from everything that makes life gracious and pleasant.

His opinions of places varied considerably, depending upon whether he was ill or comparatively well when he set them down, but his opinions of his fellow Colonials changed very little from first to last. With a few notable exceptions he hated them with a consuming hatred. They were largely responsible for the enormous amount of bile he discharged into his letters. In doing so he gained momentary relief, but there was always more and to spare where that

came from. The Australians were his particular abominations. He called them 'Orstrylyuns,' imitating their own pronunciation. There is no doubt that the lowest type of Australian is at the very bottom of the scale with respect to the white human animal. He is in all truth of the scum of the earth. There is no doubt, either, that men of this type are to be found in considerable numbers in such places as the New Hebrides. Asterisk loathed them, individually and collectively. He hated their phonographs with their cheap music-hall records. They would invade his privacy of a Sunday, bringing their 'phono' with them. And then, instead of talking on paper with his friend in England, he would be compelled to listen to the kind of music which enchanted them. I can all but hear one of them saying, ''Ere, chum, lissen to this. This is a bit of all right, this is,' and then he sets the mechanism going, and Asterisk, 'the savourer of pleasureable emotions,' listens to a Sydney vaudeville artist, singing,

> 'Old yer 'and out, naughty boy!
> 'Old yer 'and out, naughty boy!
> Larst night in the pile moonlight
> I saw yer! I saw yer!
> With a nice girl in the park, etc., etc.

He hated their accent, their obscenity, their

boastful talk of 'woyte Orstrylia for woyte Orstrylyuns,' their perpetual 'nigger-cheating,' and their shameless brutality to these same black islanders.

> . . . the treatment of these poor wretches makes me writhe. People howl about Chinese slavery. I could tell them things about the recruiting and treatment of Kanakas that would open their eyes a bit. . . . They are enticed away by every species of trickery, often by actual violence, and then the gold-greedy white man wonders that they don't toil for twelve hours in the broiling sun with one meal of rice, willingly and heartily that 'master' may become rich.
>
> I feel almost at the end of my tether and can't stand this crowd of Commonwealth yobs any longer. Their conceit is insufferable, their ignorance is unplummable. I can't even understand their language. Could you feel interested in a 'bosker come-back'? Would you, at my age, like to be called a 'Jackeroo'? . . . The English words that strike my ear are chiefly: blahdy, boi croipes, petreotism, Kichnur, and the boieys.

He acknowledges, on another occasion, that they are not all so bad as he has sometimes painted them, and he wonders whether he is not a degenerate and a snob because he dislikes their company and finds that he has nothing in common with them. Personally, I don't think he was, and in confessing that he was often utterly weary of his chance companions of the 'Saturday-

night-bath' class, with their 'boi croipses' and their 'Jackeroos,' he was more honest with himself than, for example, Walt Whitman, who shouted, on paper, 'Camerado!' to every Tom, Dick, and Harry he met.

It would be strange if, during a period of nearly eight years, he never had a really happy day. He did have some, but they were few and far between, and one seems to catch the reflected light of them long afterward, through the gloom of succeeding days. Meanwhile he was doing all sorts of things to make a living. At first he managed plantations. Then, because of his knowledge of languages — he both read and spoke French, Italian, and Spanish — he was offered, and accepted, a position as interpreter-translator at the High Court at Vila. The New Hebrides, it may be well to explain, are held jointly by France and England and governed by a joint Commission. The work here was confining, and he suffered much from fever, but as usual, it was the people rather than the work and the illness that he couldn't stand. The society of the little tropical island port was not at all to his taste, so he held himself aloof. What he disliked particularly was that in his official position he had to be both respectable and respectful.

I have to bow and smirk and say, 'Parfaitement, Monsieur le Président.' 'Je vous serai infiniment obligé, Monsieur le Procureur,' etc., when what I would like to say would not bear writing. I am longing to be free, to do, say, wear, and think what I damn well please. I didn't leave usherdom to become a *rond de cuir*, and that is what I should speedily become here if I didn't die or go mad first. Why should I be the slave of other people's convention, their paltry laws and accursed consciences? My life is all my own to play with and experiment upon just as it seems good to me. I know that this is foolish, and very largely impossible, but I intend to have my times of freedom, if only to chortle about them when I return to live among folk who dare not form an opinion for themselves, let alone perform an independent act. Ouf! — I nearly got started on a tirade.

It is hard to think of Asterisk as having been a schoolmaster; harder still to imagine his having ever wanted to be one. For as I have said, he was a born hater of conventional life, a born kicker against the pricks. Perhaps the explanation is that in school teaching he found more pricks to kick against than elsewhere. However that may be, I will venture to say that he was a first-rate master who did his work conscientiously and well, bitterly though he may have hated methods of teaching and all the rest of it. It is plain from his letters that he is a man who takes pride in his work, whether he likes it or not, and tries

always to give the best of himself whatever he may be doing. But it is remarkable that he remained a teacher for so long. He really did believe in personal freedom. He really did believe that his life was his own to experiment with as he chose. At length he decided upon an experiment which was a dangerous one, to say the least. He took a native wife, in the island fashion.

This was in the fourth year of his sojourn, and three years after his experience as court-interpreter. In the meantime, after having traveled all over the archipelago as a surveyor, he had again become a plantation manager. Evidently, his attitude toward the natives had undergone a change during these years. In 1914 he tells his friend that the New Hebrides Kanaka is the last word in ugliness, filth, and depravity, and the fact of a white man mating with a female of such a kind argues even greater depravity, and shocking bad taste, 'even on the part of an Orstrylyun.' Two years later, in announcing his decision, he explains to his friend that his wife, although a New Hebridean, comes from the island of Aoba, and that the Aobans are freaks among the natives, being Malayan rather than Papuan.

> Their complexion is light; their hair yellowish and long; their features are good. I should not call the

women classically beautiful, but they are very pleasing and petite. Also they are worshippers of bodily cleanliness, spending the whole day in the sea.

From this time on his letters are of the greatest interest, for Asterisk tried to be, and usually succeeded in being, quite honest with himself. I believe that his conventional self was thoroughly convinced, almost at once, that he had gotten into a mess; but you see his unconventional self looking at the matter from every possible angle, trying to decide whether, viewed broadly, it was really a mess or not. This latter rarely had the upper hand in the argument. Asterisk realized that he was treading a dangerous path, but despite his misgivings he got a great deal of amusement out of his 'experiment' and one can imagine him thinking, 'I wish that some of my school-mastering colleagues could look in on me now. Wouldn't they be horrified!' He taught 'Topsy,' as he called her, Biche-la-mar, and tried to learn her own island dialect. Solitude was more supportable now, and sometimes, particularly when she was ill, he realized with a shock 'how absurdly and disgustingly attached' he had grown to his little brown woman, who sat on the floor and sang little songs, behaving toward him just as a nice Persian kitten would behave.

Sometimes I have the ordinary futile longing for a soul mate, for the wife who could be all in all to me . . . for the intellectual life *à deux*. More often now I understand that I am better off with my nut-brown savage who, two minutes after a storm of tears . . . was choking with laughter over 'Simon Says Thumbs Up.' 'Allez, go on! Again! Me want win 'im you.' She will play for hours at these nursery games. Do you remember playing 'Pat-a-Cake' with your nurse? Topsy loves it. Many a time when I have been aching for sleep she has kept me up with, ''e no long time sleep yet. Allez! You me two.'

Thank heaven I can still howl with laughter and forget my age and pomposity on suitable occasions. I trust I shall never develop a sense of the fitness of things. One is always fit to be a fool, no matter what young fools may think. . . .

If I could come to Europe, pick my woman, and be free and independent to raise my kids in my own way, there would be something over which to hesitate. But the alternative is denied me. What woman — except such an one as I should loathe — would marry me, middle-aged, penniless, bald, ugly and cranky? I have not got — and I thank my own god for it — one feature that would redeem me in the eyes of such a bourgeoise as I could marry. Fancy me being even as respectable as you. . . .

It was at about this time that his friend in England had recommended his reading some Henry James. It was a curious suggestion under the circumstances, and Asterisk confessed, emphatically and picturesquely, that it didn't appeal

to him. There is no doubt in my own mind, either, that Henry James is not the novelist for a man living in wild country, more particularly in wild tropical country. I once tried reading 'The Awkward Age' on an atoll in the Low Archipelago. It was a beautiful little island; the palms were always bending to the cool trade wind, blowing across leagues and leagues of lonely sea. I was tranquil in mind, healthy in body, and wholly free from interruptions of any sort. I had very few books with me, and they had all been read and re-read many times. And yet I couldn't read 'The Awkward Age' with either understanding or sympathy. All that I got from my reading was a sense of the complete unreality of polite, civilized life, and of the art, however admirable, that dealt with it. I can understand Asterisk's lack of appreciation in the stifling, pestilential heat of the New Hebrides. It is interesting to speculate as to what Henry James would have made of life in such a place, had he gone there at Asterisk's age, for example, or perhaps a little earlier. I have said that Asterisk was a fastidious man — and so he was, despite the non-fastidious things he did — but Henry James was a thousand times more so. It was Conrad who called him 'the historian of fine consciences.' What would have happened to

him, had he been compelled to remain in such an archipelago for ten or fifteen years, say — to work for his living, and to live alone without intellectual companionship? But this is altogether too far-fetched a speculation. Henry James would never have gone in the first place.

To come back to Asterisk, not many records, however intimate, throw such a revealing light into a man's mind and heart as these letters of his do. You see every corner of both as clearly as you see his lonely figure going resolutely about his work, or sitting under a tree, thinking things over, pipe in mouth, his chin resting on his hands, and his battered old sun helmet pulled down over his eyes to keep out the intense blaze of light. You see his island, too, as vividly as though you were actually there, a ghostly witness of everything that takes place. You see him getting up of a morning, peevish and grouchy after a night of fever, of fitful sleeping and tossing and turning, and semi-delirious thinking about the future. You see his house, every detail of it, and the little house he had built for Topsy, where she spent her time 'making the most impossible botches and bungles' in the shape of clothes for the baby that was soon to be born.

Having had his coffee, he goes out to oversee

his native labor. He had a large gang to supervise, sometimes one hundred or more. He holds his 'sick-parade,' for there was always plenty of illness. The most common diseases were fever, diarrhœa, and abscesses, and of course, skin diseases innumerable. The men line up and he goes along the ranks making inquiries.

ASTERISK: You sick long what?

No. 1. Me pever, Master. (p=f) (The infirmier, a 'civilized' boy from Noumea, takes the man's temperature while A. moves on.)

A. You sick long what?

No. 2. Belly b'long me, me hear 'im, 'e no good. Me tink belly b'long me, 'e run out, finish.

A. You been kaikai what name?

No. 2. No. Me kaikai rice, no more.

A. You no been kaikai crab?

No. 2. Yes, me bin kaikai one crab. (Probably at least twenty scavenger land-crabs.)

A. (*to infirmier*) Toi, donne du sel d'Epsom à ce boy.

A. You sick long what?

No. 3. Arm b'long me 'e swell up. Me 'ear 'im, 'e strong. (Strong=hot and hard.)

A. All right. You go long house. By and by me put him on medicine. To-morrow night after to-morrow, him not very good, me cut him arm along you.

No. 3. All right, Master. Me tink very good you cut 'im.

There were always abscesses to cut, but the

natives were extraordinarily stoical and had no fear of the knife. If he didn't cut them they would do it themselves with a piece of glass, which invariably resulted in mixed infection and sinus formation. So he had to put a tabu on self-cutting.

Sick parade over, the natives are sent out to work. Asterisk follows. It wasn't such an irksome job, the overseeing business, except for the deadly monotony. He sits on a log in a little patch of shade, smokes his pipe, and thinks. Now and then he sings out, 'Go ahead there!' just to show them that he isn't asleep. Occasionally he strolls around and pretends to be in a terrible rage merely to maintain the proper respect due to the presence of a white man. He returns to his little patch of shade, and a feeling of nostalgia comes over him. To hell with the South Seas! It was only the sentimental trippers, viewing the islands from the deck of a comfortable steamer who raved about them. Let them try living on one for a year, for three months, for only three weeks. Lord! It would be good to be in England now! But what would he do in England? No — useless trying to delude himself. He had found it bad enough there before the war. It would be a thousand times worse, now, with everybody being patriotic. All those young men in Kitchener's

millions — are they really noble-minded, or are they merely sheep? If one of them had a grain of imagination, would he be so noble? What a side-splitting farce war is, looked at dispassionately. Even here he felt occasional waves of hatred against the Germans surging through his silly self. Fortunately he had the time and the requisite detachment to think of the many Germans he had known, just as harmless and silly as he himself, and so the rage quickly passed.

He thinks of Montevideo. It would be pleasant to go back there — to drop into the Club Uruguay at apéritif time, with the atmosphere thick with the fumes of Brazilian tobacco and absinthe, and some *joven distinguido* with a shocking accent reciting Verlaine. Yes, it would be amusing, but only for a short while. He would be heartily sick of the place before a week had passed.

Asterisk, Junior, who is on the way? Oh, Lord! Well, one thing was certain: it would never do to let himself become fond of the little brat. If he were to give way now, it would mean the renunciation of all that he really loved. Supposing he were to settle down in the islands for good, and try to make something of his son, for it was sure to be a boy. Plenty of white men had lived happily for years with Aoba women, and had brought

up half-caste children. But to begin with, these men were invariably the mental and physical inferiors of their native wives, and to end with, the half-castes were unspeakable. No, it wouldn't do at all, for a thousand reasons. The mockeries of civilization are one thing, but there is a world of difference between merely hating them and hurting one's head against them. As for really 'going native,' that was impossible, for him at least. We simply can't help being respectable Puritans. It isn't our fault. A fat duck who should set back the Mendelian clock a few hundred years and proclaim himself a wild bird of soaring flight, would be justly laughed at by the rest of the poultry yard. No, the family is the product of thousands of years of evolution, and those who try to upset it, or to establish weird families of mixed breed on a cannibal island, only hurt themselves and make themselves ridiculous. There were no two ways about it — he would have to shift, leave Topsy and the baby when it came, clear out of these accursed malarial islands for good. But the curious thing to reflect upon was this: when he had gone, ten to one he would think back over these years with pleasure. All the idyllic aspects of the life would become grossly exaggerated in his eyes. Once away, glamour would be sure to raise its de-

ceiving and malicious head. He might even be homesick for this Hell's Kitchen! Wasn't that always the way of it? 'There's no times like the old times!' 'Ah, you should have sailed in my last ship, mates! She was something like!' What complete, unteachable asses all men were!

These and innumerable other reflections scratched around inside his bald, middle-aged head as he went about his week-day employments, and on Sunday you see him sitting at his table, scratching them down on paper in letters to his friend. And so he went on down the road with Topsy until they came to their first important milestone, the birth of Asterisk, Junior, whom he named 'Bilbil.'

Then followed a really awful period for Asterisk. He was torn with doubts as to what he should do. One day he would decide, definitely, finally, and irrevocably that he must leave the islands at once. The next day he would decide, just as irrevocably, that he must remain, and he would elaborate plans he had made for Bilbil's upbringing. What a chance he now had to educate a boy, and his own at that, according to his own ideas!

I am a crank. I know it. I have now got in my hand most of the elements for an unordinary life — a little savage mate, a fat baby, the island life where I can't

starve or want, a cynical pleasure in flaunting before all the respectable Kerlonials tastes and fancies which I hope to transmit to my heir, an opportunity for determining that at least one child shall not grow up in damnable ignorance of nature, shall not from babyhood be loaded with the barnacles of convention. All that interests me enormously. A return to Philistia does not. I have got a unique chance now. If I were to throw it away I should deserve whatever might befall me.

But it was not only the unique opportunity which made him hesitate about leaving the islands. Little Bilbil had a great deal to do with it. The flow of affection toward him grew stronger from week to week — it worried him immensely to find how deeply the current ran. Then he would see the grown-up, half-caste son of some planter or trader, arrogant, shiftless, good for nothing, and he would say to himself, 'There goes my Bilbil twenty years from now,' and he would rush back to his house to add to a letter — in which he had outlined ambitious plans for Bilbil's education,

The sooner I get rid of him the better. . . . I have been fighting hard to convince myself that I have no color prejudices, but I chuck up now. . . . I am so afraid that if I take Bilbil away and get him among whiter things, I shall straightway begin to hate him. I know I should. No, I have made a horrid mistake. . . . The only real way out is to end the whole business before it goes any further.

Whereupon he would again complete arrangements with some decent Colonial of his acquaintance, who would see to it that Topsy and Bilbil had a comfortable and happy life after his departure. And again these plans would be unmade, and so it went on, week after week, month after month. In one of his letters he says, 'I don't suppose you've passed so many sleepless nights in your life as I have during the past year,' and no doubt he was right in supposing this.

One day Topsy came in 'for a talk,' and she told him something. It was the last straw for Asterisk. He seizes his head in his hands and sits thus for a long time. Then he takes his pen, worn to a mere stub by this time, with recounting on paper plans and canceled plans and all the cares of family life, and wearily passes on the news to his friend, adding,

> It is abominable. Topsy will have to go back to Aoba to have that child *au naturel* and leave Bilbil with me. One small métis may be *mets delicieux*, but two would be a surfeit, an orgy, an impossibility, an Oxford breakfast.

There is something comical about all this as there is in most tragic situations. Well, what was to be done now?

I am afraid I have given the impression, thus

far, that Asterisk's time and thought were wholly occupied with his personal and family cares. In reality this was far from being the case. His mind, despite frequent attacks of illness, the intense heat, and the dreary routine of plantation life, was perpetually active. He was not the kind of man who could merely sit. He had to think as well. He considered, weighed, and judged all sorts of things, and his letters are filled with these opinions and judgments, always his own and always interesting. I can't find that he deteriorated to any extent, intellectually, for all his seven and a half years of solitude. In fact, his mind during the last two years seems to have been much keener and healthier than at first. As a matter of curiosity I had thought to make a subject-index of his letters, but the task would require more time than I have to give to it. It would be an interesting one, and would show what a wide variety of matters he found to reflect upon during his exile. He was a keen observer, too; nothing escaped his attention, and he sent his friend many a lively account of island happenings, many a vivid little picture of something he had seen on the plantation or in the bush.

In February, 1919, the second baby was born, dead. On this occasion the mother had nearly a

week of agony, and was herself at the point of death when the child was delivered. At that moment she gave Asterisk a sudden brief glimpse into her strange little soul.

She was quite certain that she was going to die, but seemed equally convinced that I was going with her wherever she went.

'By and by two feller 'e go where? By and by two feller 'e go same place? 'E where? 'E long England? 'E long Nouméa? Me tink 'e stop long way too much. By and by two feller 'e go longa steamer?

'Bald 'ed, you sabby koumala (sweet potato) where me cook 'im long you, me burn 'im? By God me sorry too much long that!'

I had quite forgotten the incident. She had done even as Alfred the Great on one occasion, and I had cursed her heartily. She had evidently been consumed with shame for the heinous offense and seized the nearness of death as an opportunity for unburdening herself. To-day she is as merry as a cricket again, and if I were out of earshot would be up and off to the beloved sea for a swim.

I could write indefinitely about these letters, for they are of absorbing interest to me. Often a single paragraph offers matter for pages of comment, but I hope that I have already said enough and quoted enough to persuade some of those who have not read it to turn to the volume for themselves. It rarely happens that a man of Asterisk's antecedents and upbringing has had

the courage — or perhaps I should say, the foolhardiness — to do what he did, and of the few who have done so, not one, in so far as I know, has left a record of the experiment to be compared with his.

At last, in November, 1919, he left the New Hebrides, after having arranged for Bilbil to be adopted into a planter's family. Topsy was to remain with this family until the spirit should move her to return to her beloved Aoba. Asterisk went to Australia, and with returning health all his keen zest for life and for new experience came back to him. He was as full of plans as ever. He was going to Norfolk Island to make his fortune extracting oil of lemon; he was going to England to seek employment in a bookshop, and he asks his friend to make inquiries about possible openings in this field against his return; he was going back to school-mastering and was considering an offer in Sydney; he was going to be a commercial traveler. But some months later, on an island in French Polynesia, where he had found employment as secretary to a Phosphate Company, we find him considering yet other projects. The very last paragraph in his last letter to his English friend reads:

Just at present the moon is between the quarter and

the full, giving enough light to read by, and the palms and the surf would make me cry if they didn't make me so gorgeously happy. I think I am just beginning to know what happiness beauty can give.

Perhaps I should leave him there, giving the reader the impression, as his friend, perforce, did — that possibly he had found what he had been so long searching for. But this was not the case, and I can't forbear adding a brief postscript.

About two years ago, my own trail in the Pacific chanced to cross that of Asterisk on an island many hundreds of miles from the New Hebrides. He had long since left the phosphate island and his secretarial position there, and had been living in a remote spot on this other island of which I speak — one of the loveliest tropical islands, surely, that can be found anywhere, although, in common with many others, it is fast becoming 'civilized' and spoilt. He had spent some months here, but had moved on again into the blue — where, I don't know.

I then knew who he was, of course, and made some inquiries about him in the town. One man said, 'Do you mean that damn fool Englishman who talked like a book?' Another said, 'Oh, he's gone long ago, and a good riddance, too.' A third talked at great length of Asterisk, and spoke of

him as 'the most interesting man I've met in years, and the most unhappy.' But his impressions, he said, were only impressions. Their meetings had been casual ones, usually at the Restaurant du Port, on the monthly steamer day.

I decided to go to the country district where Asterisk had lived, to see for myself his house, and the spot he had chosen for it. It was a long journey, more than thirty-five miles around the island, but it was then the cool season of the year, and it chanced to be one of those perfect tropical days when journeys of whatever sort are delightful.

A light film of cloud had settled around the shoulders of the mountains far in the interior, but their jagged peaks jutted through into the clear air above, and the lowlands along the coast were in full sunshine. Far away, against the blue, battlemented cliffs, I could see, at times, flocks of snow-white terns gleaming and disappearing in sunlight and shadow like bits of silver paper, and the waterfalls tumbling over the headwalls of valleys were so remote that they seemed to be hanging motionless. Not a sound, of bird, or beast, or man, broke the noonday stillness. There was nothing to be heard but the faint roar of the surf on the reef, and that is not sound but the

very voice of Silence to one who has lived long on tropical islands.

The house, I discovered, was a long way from the road. I followed a foot-path pointed out to me by a native of the district. This led me through a stretch of low, partly swampy ground, pitted with the holes of land-crabs, and densely shaded by immense mapé trees with their buttressed trunks and looped and twisted roots which seem to writhe and turn as you gaze at them. Then I waded a river and soon came to rising ground. Another five minutes brought me within view of the sea again, and there, on a point of land jutting into the lagoon, I found Asterisk's dwelling.

It was just what it should have been for that spot — a little gem of a house, built in the native style, with walls of plaited bamboo, a roof of thatch, and low, overhanging eaves furnishing a pleasant veranda all round, floored with coral sand. It contained but one room which had been screened with gauze mosquito netting, but this was already rotting away, and strips of it hung down, swaying to and fro in the breeze. The thatch roof also was badly in need of repair, and there were many places where the rain had soaked through. The grass of the lawn was now growing

tall and rank, and weeds and bushes were springing up everywhere.

Whatever furniture there had been was sold or given away, I suppose, when Asterisk left; but on a nail driven into one of the posts supporting the roof, hung a discarded linen coat and an old pandanus hat, and in a corner was a walking-stick that had been cut from the bush. They were Asterisk's, undoubtedly. Some one has spoken of 'the souls of things.' They have them, or rather, they take on aspects of the souls of their owners. There was something bizarre, outlandish, about that old coat and hat, and something primly school-masterish in the way they hung from the nail, that told me at once whose they had been. As for the walking-stick, merely to look at it gave me a restless feeling. I wanted to grasp it and go striding off somewhere, lashing furiously at twigs and bushes and the heads of grasses as I went.

I walked a long way down the beach — there was no one, either white or native living anywhere in that vicinity — and came slowly back to the house. Viewed in the mellowing light of late afternoon, it looked very forsaken and desolate, so I turned my back on it and looked out to sea. I had my copy of Asterisk's letters with me, and

choosing a shady spot, sat down to glance through them again, and immediately I had a sense of the nearness of his eager, hopeful, restless, dissatisfied spirit:

I have not yet stopped shuddering at Sydney. I fear very much that London would displease me also. I look at illustrated papers and see pictures of the smug crowds, particularly the crowds. . . .

I could be very happy in Devonshire, perhaps, as long as it didn't rain, but unfortunately I couldn't spend the rest of my life in Devonshire in summer-time. . . .

Oh, England is a beastly place. Just think of the rules, the chains and fetters of brass. . . . Do you really think there is one person in London who could like or even tolerate a really free man and an unconventional life? And then, when one thinks of the country — *sacre nom d'un nom d'un nom!* . . .

At present I simply long to be in London. I am fast coming to the conclusion that fireside travel is much pleasanter than the reality. There are fewer disillusionments and one can pick one's company. . . .

I should really love to go into a 'retreat' for two whole years, to wipe myself, to try and get my mind free from my beastly body. If only such places existed without the interference of some nonsensical creed I would go. I want to live. I want neither to be praised nor blamed. . . .

I was thinking the other day of my curiously futile life, and the phrase flashed across my malaria-befuddled mind, 'The aspirations of the irresolute in common with the aspirates of the illiterate are often

dropped, often misplaced, always misunderstood.' This is a fair sample of my mental condition. I am forgetting how to talk, how to think, how even to eat. . . .

I am irresistibly drawn eastward sometimes. . . . I am sure that it is only amongst the very old things of the world that one can really find that blessed state where things are not classified as good or evil, 'done' or 'not done.' . . .

I think that the ideal South Sea Island must be left as a beautiful dream, . . . I feel sad about it, but an unsatisfied longing is better than a shattered dream. . . .

For a few pounds or even for nothing as a supercargo on a schooner, I can reach in a few days realms of bliss. And with the saved money I can live as I want to live, and know for myself what I am convinced is there awaiting me. . . .

Thus it was always with Asterisk — forever hopeful despite all disillusionments, thinking that the place where he was not was the place where 'further beauty and fuller peace' awaited him.

As I turned the pages I came upon one letter in which he had sent his friend copies of two poems he loved — rondeaus of Charles d'Orleans. They are both exquisite things, but this one chimed in best with my mood of the moment, with the drowsy spirit of the afternoon, and my thoughts of Asterisk:

Laissez-moy penser à mon aise,
Hélas! donnez m'en le loysir.
Je devise avecques Plaisir
Combine que ma bouche se taise.

Quand Merencolie mauvaise
Me vient maintes fois assaillir,
Laissez-moy penser à mon aise,
Hélas! donnez m'en le loysir.

Car afin que mon cueur rapaise,
J'appelle Plaisant-Souvenir,
Qui tantost me vient resfoüir.
Pour ce, Pour Dieu! ne vous deplaise
Laissez-moy penser à mon aise.

The refrain seemed to ring pensively in the air, to die away slowly, and to dissolve at last in the golden peace of the afternoon. I remained seated for a long while, watching the changing colors on the surface of the lagoon, thinking of Asterisk, marveling that he had left such a lovely spot, wondering where he had gone and what shape his dream would now take to lure him on.

Just before I came away I found one other relic of his. When I had opened the door of his house some scraps of paper scattered on the floor, fluttered out on the doorstep. I picked one of them up. It was the fragment of what appeared to be a letter he had written and then destroyed. The following words were written on it:

> plans are somewhat uncertain. Meanwhile
> may never be realized, and yet

That was all, but it was enough to convince me that Asterisk had written them.

What may never be realized? His dream? It must have been that he meant. If so, I hope that he still says, 'and yet ——' I hope that he has not abandoned his quest. But on what farthest star, I wonder, is the true home of the searcher for beauty, happiness, and the free life?

VI

PRAIRIE WINTER

(An Unfinished Masterpiece)

It is a poem, my own, and I call it a masterpiece because that is what I hoped it would be. It will never be finished now — that I know. I also know that you, indulgent reader, cannot be expected to view it with my eyes, or to be haunted, as I am, by its promise. Perhaps I am mistaken in thinking you indulgent? And when, presently, timidly enough, I exhibit my fragment, you may say, 'Well, of all things! And he thought this worth preserving! Why hasn't he thrown it away long ago?'

I have! Oh, I have! If you could see the paper it is written on — soiled, wrinkled, torn, scorched, I should not need to tell you how many times I have tried to get rid of it. It has been thrown into enough wastepaper baskets to furnish a modern office building with such receptacles; but always it managed to bounce out, and to get itself smoothed out and put carefully away again. Not having the courage actually to destroy it with my own hands, I have crumpled the paper into a

little ball and laid it on piles of fuel ready to be lit, in fireplaces. But when the fires were lit by my various landladies' chambermaids, the little ball rolled off and somehow escaped. Once I folded the paper so that it couldn't roll, and tucked it neatly between two billets of wood; but the maid — a particularly observant and thrifty one — of that lodging-house, discovered it while lighting the fire, and when I returned to my room, there it was, laid under the paper-weight on my desk. How often, I wonder, have I buried it deeply in an old trunk used as a receptacle for manuscripts rejected by editors, and fragments of manuscripts discarded by myself? But inevitably it rises like potential cream through this skimmed milk of my fancy, and is to be found sooner or later on top, reproaching me as the fragment of 'Kubla Khan' must have reproached Coleridge till the day of his death. I don't mean to compare my fragment with his. One man plans a palace or a cathedral, and another, less gifted, plans a dog kennel or a chicken-coop, but if they leave their work unfinished, the reproach to either is the same in kind although not in degree.

I must, somehow, exorcize forever the memory of this thing, so as to gain the leisure and peace of mind for the complete composition of some other

— and I hope, authentic — masterpiece. Therefore, since I cannot now show you what the poem might have been, may I not merely tell you how it came to be what it is? I assume — I must! — that permission has been granted.

One autumn afternoon, so many years ago that I am reluctant to remember how many, I was disturbing the dust which had settled on the shirt and collar boxes in George Kinsel's clothing store. This was my task — or one of them — before and after school hours, on Saturdays, and during summer vacations. The other duties were to sweep out the store in the morning, to build the fire in the wood-burning furnace, to run errands, and when farmers and their wives came to town, to help — or rather, to offer to help — wait on trade.

George Kinsel was a stockman by profession, and had a large cattle and hog ranch on the rich bottom lands bordering the Skunk River, about four miles from town. He had bought the clothing store as a speculation, he said, but the real reason was, I think, that he might be assured of a pleasant loafing place in the winter of his age. The store was the favorite rendezvous for many of the farmers and townsmen, and Mr. Kinsel was

always to be found there of an afternoon in seasons of bad weather. He still owned his ranch, but had retired from active business, and now lived at the Commercial Hotel, spending his time between the ranch and the store. Although he was nearly seventy, a stranger would not have suspected it. He was sound of wind and limb and as sleek as one of his own fine steers. His skin was smooth, clear, and ruddy, and his shock of thick white hair seemed to have whitened prematurely. In the mornings he usually rode out to the ranch, coming back to town at three or four in the afternoon. Having left his horse at the livery stable he would come on to the store, and I can still smell the fragrant country odor he brought with him, and hear his hearty, 'Well, boys, how's business? Sold any fur-lined underwear to-day?' as he settled down in his chair.

Billy Davidson and his cousin, John Davidson, managed the store. They were then in their late thirties and knew everything there was to be known about the country-town clothing business. They had followed it from boyhood, always at Prairie Hills, and every one in the county knew and liked them. The farmers for miles around bought their clothing and boots and shoes from the Davidson boys, and had been doing it for so

long that they were not willing even to be waited on by a new clerk, more particularly by such a young and inexperienced clerk as myself. Sometimes when a farmer's wife came in to make purchases for her husband or children, Billy would say to me, 'There's Mrs. Kelly, Jimmie. Go see what she wants.' I would go, trying to look competent and pleasant, but I knew in advance what the result would be. I would say, 'Is there something, Mrs. Kelly?' whereupon she would fold her hands across her ample stomach, glance down coldly at me, and reply, 'I want to see Billy,' or 'I want to see John.' I would then slink back to my duster and the collar boxes.

The Davidson boys did their best for me. 'Walk right up to them, Jimmie,' Billy would say. 'Don't snoop along like you was going to be whipped. And don't say, "Is there something, Mrs. Kelly?" like that. Say it this way': and he would put into the question all the assurance of his years of training and his consciousness of popularity. Well, I did my best, but the result was negligible. Not once in a month would a customer trust me to wait upon him or her, and I recall vividly how crushed and humbled I used to feel after these rebuffs. Occasionally when both the Davidson boys were busy, some farmer would

permit me to sell him some shoelaces, or a pair of corn-husking gloves, or a collar button, but that is about as far as tolerance of my services went.

The result was that I developed a flourishing inferiority complex. In those days, to be sure, we didn't know there were such things, but we had them nevertheless — at any rate I had one. It was small and sickly at first, but it battened upon every one of Mrs. Kelly's or Mrs. Grosvenor's cold, disparaging looks, and gathered rich and vital nourishment from each of Mrs. Ed Schlosser's or Mrs. Sam Akerman's emphatic rebuffs. The refrain, 'I want to see Billy,' or 'I want to see John,' rang everlastingly in my ears. They never wanted to see me, and I began to wonder what I was good for, or whether I was good for anything.

Then I discovered that there was one thing I could do — I could write poetry. I was sure it was poetry because a Des Moines paper had printed one of my compositions, and I had the immense satisfaction of hearing Mr. Kinsel read it aloud as he sat in his chair by the hot-air register. 'Well, now, that ain't so bad,' he said — 'not so bad at all,' and immediately I rushed down to the furnace room to exult in solitude. I had not attached my name to the production,

which added sweetness to the triumph. 'Wouldn't he be surprised,' I thought, 'if he knew that the author of that poem is right here in Prairie Hills, throwing wood at this very minute into his furnace?' Thereafter I wrote poetry with a vengeance, and Mr. Kinsel and the Davidson boys thought I had become studious of a sudden, and was working at my arithmetic lessons.

Meanwhile my clerkly sufferings went on, but they were alleviated by the social side of life in the clothing business. The store, as I have said, was a favorite loafing place, particularly in the winter time, and those who made use of it were known, collectively, as 'The Kinsel Club.' George was the permanent president, and the members most faithful in attendance were Doc Nickerson, Phineas Cragie, the lawyer, Charley MacManus, the livery-stable keeper, old Mr. Brandt, the proprietor of the Commercial Hotel, and Scott Cassidy, another cattle man, reputed to be the hardest drinker in the county. In fact, Scott was the only member of the Club who drank steadily, persistently, year in and year out. He had kept it up since boyhood, and people were always saying, at least some people were, that he couldn't possibly outlast the year. But he had a cast-iron stomach and lived a healthy, outdoor life, and so

the prophets were always being disappointed. Hard as he drank no one ever saw him drunk. Whisky was his favorite beverage, but its only apparent effect upon him was to make him more than usually susceptible to music.

We had a great deal of music at Kinsel's store — at any rate, we called it music. Indeed, it *was* music in so far as the Davidson boys were concerned. They both had beautiful voices. John was a high tenor, and I never tired of hearing him sing, 'I Know a Bank Whereon the Wild Thyme Grows.' Billy was a baritone, and when he sang, 'Every Morn I Send Thee Violets,' we all listened in respectful silence, and heartily agreed with Mr. Kinsel who said they couldn't do it better than that in Chicago or New York City. We had part-singing too. John Davidson and Johnnie Wilderman, who worked in Bruce Baldwin's barber-shop, were the first tenors, Orpheus Banks, the colored chore-boy at the Commercial Hotel, and I were second tenors; and Billy Davidson and Morse Eldridge the first and second basses.

What concerts we used to have! It gives me almost as much pleasure to think of them as it did to partake in them. I sometimes — in fact, quite often — 'played hookey' from school in order to be on hand, and I am sure that I gained

more edification to my soul than I would have, had I remained walled in with blackboards, learning the names of the State capitols and how to bound Jasper County. About two in the afternoon Johnnie Wilderman would come in, and shortly afterward, Morse Eldridge from the drug-store. Orpheus Banks was usually kept busy until three, washing up the after-dinner dishes at the hotel; but the moment he was free he would race over with a look of eager anticipation on his jolly black face. Then Mr. Kinsel would say, 'Well, boys, all present? How about favoring the Club with a little music?' and Scott Cassidy, settling back more comfortably in his chair, would shift his quid, spit luxuriously down the hot-air register, and say, 'That's just what I was thinkin', George! Tune up, boys! Tune up! Let's have "Swingin' in the Grape-Vine Swing" for a starter.'

Then we began, for we required no urging at all. We had a large repertoire. Charley MacManus, who had never been out of Iowa, liked sea songs, and we gave him 'Nancy Lee' and 'Sailing, Sailing, Over the Bounding Main.' Old Mr. Brandt always called for 'Juanita,' and 'In the Evening by the Moonlight,' and beat time with his hand as we sang. Phineas Cragie liked 'Honey, Honey, Bless Your Heart,' and that was my favorite too.

But there was one song that showed our virtuosity at its best. I've forgotten the name of it, but the chorus began with the basses singing:

O-o-oh come, come, come, come,
TENORS: Come where the lilies,
The sweet fragrant lilies,
Come where the lilies bloom so fair.
BASSES: Bloom so fair, oh, come and
FULL CHORUS: Down in the meadow,
The green shady meadow,
Come where sweet perfume fills the air.

This song often made Scott Cassidy cry. 'Stop, boys! Please stop!' he would say. 'It's too pretty; I can't stand it.' A certain heart-wringer for Doc Nickerson was 'The Old Oaken Bucket,' and the moment we began

How de-e-ar to my he-e-art are the sce-e-nes of my childhood,

his eyes would become moist. He didn't actually weep, but he came very near it. He said that 'wildwood' was the most beautiful word in the English language, and that 'deep tangled wildwood' made him think of the timber land along the Skunk River.

But to return to — or rather, to approach — the masterpiece: on the day I have already mentioned Morse Eldridge and Johnnie Wilderman were lounging on the counters in the rear of the store. We were waiting for Orpheus Banks, who

was still busy with his dish-washing at the hotel. It was a dismal afternoon in late November, with a north wind blowing flaws of sleet against the windowpanes, but I had the furnace going full blast, and within doors we were snug and comfortable. Billy and John Davidson were unpacking and ticketing some cases of felt-lined overshoes, and I was at my usual task of dusting. The Kinsel Club was in session around the hot-air register in the rear of the store, and Phineas Cragie was holding the floor. Mr. Cragie owned the building which housed the store. Upstairs, he and Doc Nickerson and Henry Hillman, the fire-and-tornado insurance agent, had their offices. There was one extra room furnished as a lodging, which was let to strangers in need of such accommodation, and Mr. Cragie was telling the Club of a new arrival at Prairie Hills who had just rented this room. Mr. Kinsel had remarked that he couldn't figure out who these various strangers were.

'You're right, George,' Mr. Cragie replied. 'I've often wondered about it myself. That room of mine is never empty for more than a month at a time. As soon as one goes along comes another. Where do they come *from*, and where do they go after they leave here? I guess they haven't money enough to stay at the hotel, but they're never

dead-beats. They always take their meals at Jay Champ's restaurant, and Jay's told me his experience has been the same as mine: he's never lost a nickel by any of 'em. They're quiet, decent men, and I've noticed this, too: they're great readers. They sit in their room half the time, reading books they get from the library or bring with 'em. In the afternoon they take a walk, along the river, maybe, or down the railroad track past the Chautauqua grounds. Then they come back and read some more. In three or four months off they go, and that's the last you ever see or hear of 'em. Who in the world are they? And why do they come to Prairie Hills?'

Mr. Brandt thought there was nothing very mysterious about the matter.

'They're just natural-born wanderers, Phin. In a country the size of this, there's bound to be a lot of men like that — not the marrying kind and not the business kind. They don't fit in anywhere in the settled-down life most of us have to live, and they have sense enough to see that they don't. So they just travel around watching the show. If I wasn't saddled down with my hotel I'd like to do just that.'

'They're not the religious kind either,' said Charley MacManus. 'Do you remember the one

who had your room last winter, Phin? I've never forgot and never will, how old Hattie Gimling tried to save him at the revival meetings. I happened to be sitting right behind him. There was the choir, singing 'Almost Persuaded,' and Hat and the rest of her crowd of soul-savers was going the rounds of the sinners trying to drag them up to the mourners' bench. She knew better than to tackle me, but I guess she thought this stranger looked easy. Anyway, she sat down beside him and started in with her begging and pleading, and he didn't pay any more attention to her than if she hadn't been within a thousand miles. That got Hat. If he'd showed that he knew she was talking to him I guess she wouldn't have felt so mortified, but he sat like a stone image. I don't know when I've enjoyed anything like I did that. She gave in after a while and snuk away looking awful silly.'

They were in the midst of this discussion when Mr. Cragie's new lodger himself appeared, and stopped near the front door to examine the contents of a show-case.

'Go see what he wants, Jimmie,' said Billy Davidson, and I went forward with my usual misgivings. This time I knew that I should not hear, 'I want to see Billy,' but I fully expected that he

would say, 'I want to see the proprietor.' Instead of that he greeted me very pleasantly and asked me to show him a winter overcoat.

I was so taken aback by this sign of trust that I must have shown it by my manner, for he said, 'Well, what's the matter? Haven't you any winter overcoats?'

'Oh, yes, sir,' I replied, and immediately began showing him our stock. He tried on a coat, and I ventured to use one of John Davidson's favorite sales-remarks. 'That will wear like iron,' I said.

'It will?' he said, glancing back at me over his shoulder. 'Iron gets rusty when exposed to the weather. Do you mean this coat will get rusty too?'

'Oh, no! I don't mean that. I mean ——'

'You mean that you don't know what you mean. Choose your words more carefully, young man. And don't make such absurd remarks to your customers. But no matter,' he added with a faint smile. 'I can see that it's a good coat. How much is it?'

'Twenty-two dollars,' I replied, hardly believing it possible that I was about to make a sale of such magnitude. But I was not long in doubt. He brought forth a leather wallet and counted out the money.

'Take off the tags,' he said. 'I'll wear the coat.'

He put it on at once and left the store, and I have not forgotten my satisfaction when Mr. Kinsel — fortunately my 'selling-talk' had not been heard in the rear of the store — said, 'That's the way to do business, Jimmie. Billy, we'll make a clerk of him yet.'

One evening, shortly afterward, I was alone in the store. Billy had gone to supper, and John was at the barber-shop. I was working on another poem: it may have been 'The Old Wind-Mill' which was modeled on James Whitcomb Riley's 'Old Swimmin' Hole,' or perhaps it was 'The Whip-Poor-Will,' for it must have been at about this time that I was trying so hard to immortalize this 'most musical, most melancholy' bird. Whatever the poem, I was interrupted in the midst of composition. Phineas Cragie's new lodger entered, and before I knew there was any one about, he was standing beside me.

'What are you doing, sonny? Writing a school composition?'

'No, sir.'

'What is it, then?'

'It's a poem,' I replied.

I wouldn't have admitted this, not for any consideration, to Mr. Kinsel or the Davidson boys,

but it seemed quite easy and natural to tell this stranger.

'A poem? Let me see it, will you?'

When he had read it his only comment was, 'Hmm!' Then he said he wanted some shoe polish.

I was immensely disappointed, but tried not to show it. I picked up my old friend in adversity, the feather-duster, and resumed my usual labors. He sat on the counter, his hands clasped over his knee. At length he said,

'Do you like to read poetry?'

'Yes, sir.'

'What have you read?'

I said that I had read all of Longfellow, and Whittier, and James Whitcomb Riley.

'Any of Keats or Shelley? Any of Milton or Tennyson, or Wordsworth?' and he went on to quiz me at length. I was ashamed of my ignorance. I didn't know there were so many English and American poets. Finally he said, 'I'll tell you what: come up to my room this evening after the store closes, and we'll read some poetry. I have some books that will interest you.'

That was the beginning of a friendship which meant more to me than I can say. I have never since met any one with a purer love for poetry.

What a teacher he would have made! What a teacher he did make for me! That winter we read everything from Chaucer to Kipling which he thought I was able to understand and appreciate; and now when I read Milton's 'Comus,' or Wordsworth's 'Solitary Reaper,' or Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind,' or Tennyson's 'Passing of Arthur,' the music always comes to me through his voice.

On Sundays we took long walks into the country, each time in a new direction. He loved the prairies, and told me that he thought the most beautiful country in all America was to be found in Iowa and Illinois. One February afternoon we took the road that leads southward from town. It was a cold gray day with flurries of snow, and he made it seem colder still by quoting from Keats's 'The Eve of Saint Agnes.' However, he had on his twenty-two-dollar overcoat, and I had one, a little cheaper but quite as warm, which Mr. Kinsel had given me as a Christmas present. We walked for a long way in silence, and coming to a sheltered spot on the south slope of a hill, sat down to rest. The wind blew in icy gusts over the crest of the hill, rustling through the dry grass with a mournful, seething sound. I don't know what I was thinking, or thinking of, but presently I said aloud:

'Like hissing foam the windy, withered grasses crawl.'

My companion looked up quickly.

'What?' he said. 'Say that again.'

'Like hissing foam the windy, withered grasses crawl.'

'Who wrote it?'

'Nobody.'

'Where did you hear it, then?'

'I didn't hear it anywhere. It just popped into my head all of a sudden.'

'It did? Do you mean that? Why, Jimmie, it's a beautiful line! Keats himself might have been proud of it! But what do you know about hissing foam? You've never seen the ocean, have you?'

I confessed that I had not.

'That's curious,' he said. Then he repeated the line in his deep, sonorous voice, and it really did sound beautiful.

'It's precisely right!' he said. 'The grass does seem to crawl with the hissing sound of foam. See here! You must write a poem around this! That's the way poetry is made. You first catch a glimpse of it in just this way. Wait a minute! How will this do for a title — 'Prairie Winter'? Jimmie, I believe you've gotten something first rate here — none of your 'Old Wind-Mills' or 'Poor Whip-Poor-Wills' — something really good. Where's your pencil?'

Neither of us had a pencil, and he insisted that we should go home at once. 'You must strike now while the iron is hot,' he said. 'Don't fold your hands and wait for the rest of the poem to come to you. No poet ever did that.'

He strode on so fast that I had difficulty in keeping up with him, and every little while he would repeat the marvelous line. 'That's beautiful! Splendid!' he would say. When we had reached his room he brought forth pen, ink, and a large sheet of clean, shiny, note-paper, and at his suggestion I wrote 'Prairie Winter' at the top.

'That's the only hint I mean to give you,' he said. 'The rest of the poem must be yours.'

He then told me to write, midway on the page, the one line which was to suggest the others, which was to appear like a mournful refrain at the close of each stanza.

This same paper now lies on the table beside me, but it is no longer clean and shiny. It is yellow at the edges — torn, wrinkled, scorched, as I have said, and grimy with the accumulated soilure of many years. But soilure is all that it has accumulated. Not a line — not so much as a single word, has ever been added to the original manuscript which is almost worn out with many

erasures. My friend left Prairie Hills in the spring of that same year, and I have neither seen nor heard of him since. He told me that I needn't expect to hear from him. 'I'm not the letter-writing kind,' he said. I went with him to the train on the night of his departure. He boarded the smoking-car, and having found a seat, raised the window to have a last word with me.

'Jimmie,' he said, 'we'll not meet again, very likely. I want you to promise me one thing: that you'll finish "Prairie Winter."'

'I'll try,' I said. 'I'll try my hardest.'

And I have tried. I tried all of that spring. I tried several years later when I went away to school. I've tried in Chicago, Boston, New York, London, Paris. I tried during the war — half-heartedly, I confess — when sitting in trenches on the western front, listening to the hissing of the wind in the withered grass of No Man's Land, and the less pleasant hissing sound of shell fragments and machine-gun bullets. I tried during the spring and summer of 1918, while cooling my heels in various German prison camps. I tried after the Armistice, when the statesmen of Europe were composing — and alas! finishing — that other masterpiece, the Treaty of Versailles. I tried, still later, in Copenhagen, and in Bergen, Norway.

And only a few weeks ago, at Tahiti, I made a last feeble effort. Yes, I think I may say with truth that I have tried. And I *can't* finish it. But now, I believe — at least I hope — that I've finished *with* it.

VII

UNDER THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

It was a curious experience to have in Iceland, for in that country it is not only easy to forget the modern world, but inevitable that one should. It is by far the most sparsely populated country in Europe, and the Industrial Revolution which has so altered the rest of the world has scarcely been felt there. Life flows quietly on much as it did centuries ago, and if you chance to carry in your pocket a volume of the ancient sagas, you will find yourself living so vividly in the Iceland of a thousand years ago that it seems you have actually strayed back there in the flesh.

Those familiar with the Icelandic sagas know what a clear and living picture they give of the life of the early settlers in that ancient Commonwealth. Men and women living then seem more real than one's contemporaries. One hears their speech, sees them going about the work on the farms, riding to some great wedding feast or to springtime or autumn *leet;* and so simply and clearly are the stories told that one not only

shares the thoughts, but all but shares the passions of those who took part in them.

I had been reading at this time what is to my mind the finest of the sagas, 'The Story of Burnt Njál,' traveling meanwhile on horseback toward the North Country, watching the gradually increasing splendor of the northern lights as autumn wore away to winter, until it seemed that I had always been living this solitary, happy life. The silence was like a ravishing music, and the croaking of ravens and the bleating of sheep were parts of it, their tiny forms, black against the sky or faintly white against the mighty shoulders of the mountains, like notes in the score. At length, after a leisurely journey, I emerged on the north coast and found quarters at a farmhouse almost under the Arctic Circle.

All through boyhood the Arctic Circle had been a dream-nourishing name to me. It had a splendor, not of earth, to light me to bed at night and to keep me awake after I got there. It was no mere geographical abstraction, but something — well, something quite otherwise. I thought of it as an arc rather than a circle, standing upright like a gigantic portal leading to the vast kingdoms of the North, through which I passed to great and memorable adventures. And there, on the thresh-

old of the Polar Sea, I did have one adventure, memorable enough in a sense, but it was not at all what I had hoped for.

There was a village some five miles distant along the coast from the farmhouse. Shortly after my arrival in the North Country, I decided to spend a day in walking there and back.

It was a beautiful autumn morning, Indian-summer-like in its warmth and stillness and silence. I would not have believed that such days were known so late in the year at that high latitude. On my left hand was the sea, slate-blue in color and not a sail on it anywhere. On the right hand a great heath slanted up toward distant mountains which were outlined in exquisite purity in the clear air. Presently I came to a sheltered spot close by the road, carpeted with heather and filled to the brim with sunshine. Being in no hurry I sat down there to read another chapter or two in the 'Njál Saga,' and the story so deeply engaged my interest that I read on and on, and was surprised upon looking up to find that the brief day was already nearing its end. The sun was just disappearing behind the mountains, and one isolated peak, all golden with sunset light, threw a huge cone-shaped shadow across the heath and far out over the sea.

I walked on, thinking of the events of the tragic tale I had just been reading, marveling at the freshness of interest after all these centuries, when I was startled by the sound of a motor horn close behind me. As I stepped quickly aside, the car slowed down and came to a halt, and a man in the rear seat called out, in English, 'Want a ride?'

I didn't, as a matter of fact, but I climbed in, or rather seemed to be lifted in by the scruff of the neck by one of the old trolls that used to wander the mountains and moorlands of Iceland after set of sun.

'Well!' I said to the man who had greeted me, 'this is the first motor car I've seen in a long time. I'd almost forgotten that there are such things.'

He looked at me in astonishment. 'For the Lord's sake!' he said, 'do you speak English? I supposed you were an Icelander, but I hailed you anyway because I knew you'd understand what a ride meant. Where you from — not the States? Is that a fact! So am I! Say, this beats all, don't it? The world's a small place. Think of meeting some one from home way up here!'

He went on to tell me that he was traveling around the coast from Reykjavík by the Danish steamer. The vessel had put in to discharge some cargo at the village to which we were bound and

he had found a car there. Having nothing better to do he had hired it for a couple of hours to have a quick glance at the country.

'But this road only goes eight miles,' he added with disgust. 'Then it's nothing but a pony trail, and they tell me it's one of the main roads on the north coast! Ever see such a country? It's about five hundred years behind the times. I haven't had a decent bath since I left Copenhagen. You know, they're just waking up to the fact that they've got a lot of power going to waste in all these rivers, and it was an American who pointed it out. They don't know they're alive, these people; but now a few places are putting in hydro-electric stations. That's why I'm here — I'm in the electrical-supply business. What's your line, if you don't mind my asking?'

I couldn't help smiling, inwardly, at the way he took it for granted that I must be selling something. The implication was that no one would come to Iceland unless compelled to for business reasons. I left him at the wharf and watched the little steamer pull away from shore and vanish in the gathering dusk; then I walked by starlight back to the farmhouse. I tried hard to recapture my mood of the earlier part of the day — to get back into the spirit of tenth-century Iceland, but

it was useless. The cheery, matter-of-fact voice of my chance companion still sounded in my ears, and the words, 'What's your line, if you don't mind my asking?' seemed to linger in the air, echoing and faintly reëchoing against the Arctic Circle.

VIII

GLAMOROUS PLACES

I

THE world — of getting and spending, of laying waste our powers in struggle toward trivial or ignoble ends — is too much with us, as Wordsworth observed. It is even more oppressively with us, I think, than it could have been with the folk of Wordsworth's time. Now, much of the getting is on credit, the spending before earning, and this, the economists tell us, is as it should be. Thrift is no longer a virtue; simplicity of life is a crime against society; and a man, if he is to sleep with an easy conscience, must be able to say upon retiring, 'I have consumed more to-day than I did yesterday,' for the machines, our masters, demand that he should. Enough of this sorry world! But can we ever have enough of that other world which a few men, to our everlasting delight, have fashioned and are fashioning to meet our higher needs? Never, surely; at any rate, I never tire of it, and the older I grow, the oftener do I resort there, the happier become my sojourns, and the deeper and more satisfying my refreshment.

But 'explored' is a better word, perhaps, than 'fashioned,' for some of the greatest — who are always the humblest — of these benefactors seem to doubt that theirs is really a work of creation. It has merely been their privilege, they say — they know not why or how — to reveal to us small fragments of this World of Art. But they are never sure of the authenticity of their several revelations, and the reason for the doubt is, that when two or three of them have visited, presumably, the same country, charted the same coasts, explored the same rivers, climbed the head-walls of the same valleys, they return, inevitably, with reports at such variance to each other.

But we who read these reports, who follow them, later, on their journeys, are better able to judge which of them are explorers in the great line. We know immediately, it seems to me, when one of them has seen and reported truly — glamorously, it may be, but none the less truly on that account. To be sure, the distinguished authors of the Oxford Dictionary define glamour as 'delusive or alluring beauty.' Keats said that beauty is truth, and in a definition of the properties of beauty one would rather trust a poet's instinct than a philologist's reasoned deductions. If, therefore, glamour is beauty, and beauty is

truth, how can it be delusive? The Oxford Dictionary must be in error.

II

One of these discovered countries; one of the lands now authentically revealed in this sense, is Joseph Conrad's Patusan. It may have been explored before his day; indeed, I seem to remember having read of it under other names, in the narratives of other men who professed to have been there. But they were either the Doctor Cooks of their profession, or men lacking the gift for imaginative exploration, and so their records serve only to show how the work of discovery should not be done, or to gather dust on the top shelves in libraries. But the Patusan of 'Lord Jim' — Conrad's, Marlow's Patusan — who can doubt that it exists? There is no doubt in my own mind, for I have been there again and again. But few lands that I have seen, heard, smelled, or tasted with the physical senses are so real to me as Patusan.

I recall vividly my first glimpse of it. I was having lunch with a friend in a noisy restaurant on Washington Street, in Boston. We were old friends, past the need for talking much, and leisure was so precious in those days that our

reading was done chiefly at mealtime. On this occasion we were seated on opposite sides of the table, he with his book and I with mine. Presently he said, 'Listen to this,' and he read me the following passage:

The coast of Patusan is straight and somber, and faces a misty ocean. Red trails are seen like cataracts of rust, streaming under the dark green foliage of bushes and creepers clothing the low cliffs. Swampy plains open out at the mouth of the rivers, with a view of jagged blue peaks beyond the vast forests. In the offing, a chain of islands, dark, crumbling shapes, stand out in the everlasting sunlit haze like the remnants of a wall breached by the sea.

'Do you see the place?' he asked, looking up from the page.

See it! I saw it as clearly as though I were there in the flesh, and I was conscious of that feeling of elation which becomes almost painful in its intensity, when beauty of whatever sort is revealed to one.

'What is it, a travel book?' I asked. 'Who wrote it? Where is Patusan?'

'Yes, in a sense it *is* a travel book,' he replied. He turned the leaves and read again:

Patusan is a remote district of a native-ruled state, and the chief settlement bears the same name. At a point on the river about forty miles from the sea, where the first houses come into view, there can be

seen rising above the level of the forests, the summits of two steep hills, very close together, and separated by what looks like a deep fissure, the cleavage of some mighty stroke. As a matter of fact the valley between is nothing but a narrow ravine; its appearance from the settlement is of one irregularly conical hill split in two, and with the two halves leaning slightly apart. On the third day after the full, the moon, as seen from the open space in front of Jim's house, rose exactly behind these hills, its diffused light at first throwing the two masses into intensely black relief, and then the nearly perfect disc, glowing ruddily, appeared, gliding upward between the sides of the chasm till it floated above the summits as if escaping from a yawning grave in gentle triumph.

Thus it happened, one very hot July day, many years ago, that I had my first glimpse of Patusan. Or rather, two glimpses, one by day and one by night. I think it was the moonlight view which then worked the deepest enchantment, and you may remember that Conrad — or Marlow if you choose — was bewitched by it, too. He spent a month at Patusan, saw the moon wax and wane, and could never have enough of the spectacular effect of its rise from the depths of the ravine. He describes it again and again, and always from the same, or nearly the same, vantage point.

I have said that Patusan, since Conrad's visit,

is a land authentically revealed. Not wholly revealed, of course; the charts or maps of the glamorous world show no country in its entirety. There is always *terra incognita* beyond and those who will may make explorations of their own. But such journeys must always be disappointing for most of us. I sometimes go in imagination, far beyond the chief settlement at Patusan, traversing country which Conrad never saw, but I make no remarkable discoveries there. The villages farther up the river are picturesque, to be sure, but they have scarcely a trace of glamour, whether by day or by night. I come upon the charred remnants of fires where, quite possibly, Jim and his faithful servant, Tamb' Itam, camped during their excursions up-country, but Conrad did not see them there, and so they remain, the remnants of supper fires, nothing more. But always as I retrace my steps I am aware of a quickening of the pulses, a deep thrill of expectation. I pass as through an invisible wall into the country Conrad knew, and *I* know by the change in me, by the marvelous change in the aspect of everything around me, that the hinterlands of Patusan will never really be seen by any one, now that Conrad may return no more.

It would be futile to regret this. He gave us

enough, surely, to satisfy any but the least reasonable of men. You may travel whithersoever you will in the realm of books, and find no country of such melancholy beauty, no people — whether groups or individuals — so vividly realized as those of Patusan. It seems to me the very kingdom of Romance, to which all other lands along those coasts are but tribute-paying dependencies. And if you have never been that way before, you may know the place by this: A chain of islands sits, broken and massive, facing a wide estuary, displayed in a sheet of pale glassy water reflecting faithfully the contour of the shore. Near the entrance to the river is a spit of white beach, backed by a low cliff wooded on the brow and draped in creepers to the very foot. A village of sooty, flimsy mat hovels is perched here over its own inverted image, upon a multitude of crooked piles the color of ebony; and high in the colorless sunshine, a solitary bird, all black, hovers, dropping and soaring above the same spot, with a slight rocking motion of the wings.

III

There is a small, independent principality, not a stone's throw, in so far as glamorous realization is concerned, from the indefinable boundaries

of Patusan, and somehow, mediæval Paris is its capital — a Paris of a single aspect, and for one night only: an intensely cold winter night in the year 1456.

But during the early part of the evening, although snow was falling heavily, it was not so bitterly cold as it became toward midnight. At first,

> the air was raw and pointed but not far below freezing; and the flakes were large, damp, and adhesive. The whole city was sheeted up. An army might have marched from end to end and not a footfall given the alarm. If there were any belated birds in heaven, they saw the island like a large white patch, and the bridges like slim white spars, on the background of the river. High up overhead the snow settled among the tracery of the cathedral towers. Many a niche was drifted full; many a statue wore a long white bonnet on its grotesque or sainted head. The gargoyles had been transformed into great false noses, drooping toward the point. The crockets were like upright pillows, swollen on one side. In the intervals of the wind, there was a dull sound of dripping about the precincts of the church.

You recognize Stevenson's Paris. He too had the seeing eye, although he never again saw to such splendid purpose, or reported so truly as when he gave us 'A Lodging for the Night.' There are times when I suspect that it is not

fiction, and that Stevenson may have been François Villon reincarnate. To be sure, he tried to conceal the fact, if it was a fact. One remembers how he sometimes played the moralist in public; played it even — and how savagely, in 'Familiar Studies' — over the ghost of poor François the First. One remembers, too, the Vailima prayers which are still to be found in art shops, suitably printed and framed for hanging in the guest bedroom. But was not Villon something of a moralist upon occasion? And surely no one but he could have written of that search for lodgings nearly five centuries ago, and of the midnight visit to Enguerrand de la Feuillée, Seigneur de Brisetout, Bailly du Patatrac — a Villon seeing himself with the detachment which comes with reincarnation into a Scotch-Covenanter family, but telling of what he sees with the relish and the vividness of detail which can only be the result of richly savored personal experience.

However, I may be mistaken. Perhaps this Paris is really Edinburgh, and Villon really Stevenson, and the Seigneur de Brisetout really Stevenson's father, talking like a Dutch uncle to his wayward son. Perhaps — but enough! I am not a psychographer, or whatever it is they

are called. I wish to lay bare no man's soul, so I pass on these hints to some eager amateur of the dubious science of psychic anatomy.

I visit this Paris at least once every year, and of late the visits have been even more delightful than they used to be; for I am now living at Tahiti where there is nothing to remind one of winter. During the rainy season it requires a conscious effort merely to breathe the warm, moisture-laden atmosphere, and physical movement becomes all but impossible at certain hours of the day. Sometimes when I am quite literally at my last gasp, physically and mentally, I manage, by a tremendous effort of will, to drag myself to my bookcase. I take from the shelf the 'New Arabian Nights' and fall exhausted on a sofa. But those small, winged, tireless reminders that hell's torment is here and now and forever, sting me to a last effort. I stagger from sofa to cot-bed, and with the mosquito curtains drawn, give myself up for a moment solely to the business of keeping alive. But this is necessary only for a moment. I have a sovereign cure for all the ills of the tropics, even in the rainy season. I open my book and no longer hear the shrill lament of frustrated mosquitoes, or the drumming of rain on the iron roof. Silence falls; night falls; Tahiti

vanishes as though it had never been, and I find myself standing, knee-deep in snow, near the cemetery of Saint John.

Although my physical body is still at Tahiti under the mosquito netting — and streaming, it may be, with perspiration — my spiritual body is already numb with cold, and I enter gratefully through the closed door of the little house backed up against the cemetery wall. There they all are, just as I found them upon entering last year: Dom Nicolas, the Picardy monk, straddling a chair, his back to the blaze, 'his skirts picked up and his fat legs bared to the comfortable warmth,' a pool of firelight showing between his outspread feet; Villon and Guy Tarbary huddled together over a scrap of parchment, the first draft of Villon's 'Ballade of Roast Fish'; Montigny and Thevenin Pensete playing cards on the other side of the room, the gloom on Montigny's face growing deeper and more ominous as he loses hand after hand. Tarbary is laughing over Villon's joke about the medlars on the three-legged medlar tree.

'Oh, stop that row,' said Villon, 'and think of rhymes to "fish."'

'Doubles or quits,' said Montigny doggedly.

'With all my heart,' quoth Thevenin.

'Is there any more in that bottle?' asked the monk.

'Open another,' said Villon. 'How do you ever hope to fill that big hogshead, your body, with little things like bottles? And how do you expect to get to heaven? How many angels, do you fancy, can be spared to carry up a single monk from Picardy? Or do you think yourself another Elias — and they'll send the coach for you?'

'*Hominibus impossible*,' replied the monk as he filled his glass.

Tarbary was in ecstacies. Villon filliped his nose again.

'Laugh at my jokes if you like,' he said.

'It was very good,' objected Tarbary.

Villon made a face at him. 'Think of rhymes to "fish,"' he said. 'What have you to do with Latin? You'll wish you knew none of it at the great assizes when the devil calls for Guido Tarbary, *clericus* — the devil with the hump-back and the red-hot finger nails. Talking of the devil,' he added in a whisper, 'Look at Montigny!'

All three peered covertly at the gamester. He did not seem to be enjoying his luck. His mouth was a little to one side; one nostril nearly shut, and the other much inflated. The black dog was on his back, as people say in terrifying nursery metaphor; and he breathed hard under the grewsome burthen.

'He looks as if he could knife him!' whispered Tarbary, with round eyes.

The monk shuddered, and turned his face and spread his open hands to the red embers. It was the cold that thus affected Dom Nicolas and not any excess of moral sensibility.

'Come now,' said Villon — 'about this ballade: how

does it run so far?' And beating time with his hand, he read it aloud to Tarbary.

It may be, as has often been said, that a man's only hope of immortality, so called, lies in the nature of the work he may be able to leave behind him, but if he be an artist, I believe his best hope for survival as an individual is in whatever chance there may be that some other artist will surprise him in the midst of his work at such a moment as this. Villon's poems survive, to be sure, but he himself lives for me because Stevenson traveled across the centuries to find him composing his 'Ballade of Roast Fish.' And he would be no less real if that ballad and all of the others had long since been lost and forgotten. I often wonder in what company I look on at this scene, listen to this dialogue. There must be many and frequent visitors to this Paris of a single night: are they too so fully convinced of the reality of these men? Or is glamour the delusive medium it is said to be by the philologists? For my own part, I confess that after the affair of Thevenin's murder, as I follow Master Francis through the silent streets in his belated search for lodgings, I am seized with the melancholy conviction that *I* am the ghost, not he. In that 'bright, windy phase of the night's existence,' his own existence has the imperishable

reality which glamour gives it. The very snow of that yesteryear has lain on the streets, unsullied and unmelted, these four centuries and more, and his own footprints in it, speaking so eloquently of fruitless quest until they lead, at last, to the Seigneur de Brisetout's door.

And when, after his incomparably brilliant, impudent, and able defense of the profession of knavery, the door opens again and he swaggers out into the pale winter dawn, the thought of the impending separation strikes a malarial chill into my blood.

'God pity you!' says the lord of Brisetout.

'Good-bye, papa; many thanks for the cold mutton,' Francis replies.

The door closes with a dull boom, and the bolts are shot into place. The poet stands for a moment in the middle of the road and stretches himself.

'A very dull old gentleman,' I hear him say. 'I wonder what his goblets may be worth?'

Then he vanishes, and I find myself sprawling under the mosquito netting, shivering with heat and cold at the same moment, as though I had been taken by the scruff of the neck by the devil 'with the hump-back and the red-hot finger nails,' and flung at one easy toss back to the tropics, into my own century.

We shall never know what the goblets may be worth, but this story, it seems to me, is worth whatever it may have cost its creator. Perhaps he worked over it for weeks and months; perhaps he threw it lightly off, at one sitting. However that may be, he was inspired, for the space of it, as it is given to few artists, even the greatest, ever to be inspired. General Wolfe, according to legend, said that he would rather be the author of Gray's 'Elegy' than the victor at Quebec. Humble men may have their hopeless preferences, too, and I would rather have written 'A Lodging for the Night' than write all the novels to win all the prizes offered by all the publishers in this year of grace, 1927.

IV

The discoverers, or creators, or what you will, in this tradition are not all dead. A few of them are living to-day, and in America there is at least one — Willa Cather.

What is Miss Cather? A realist? I suppose so, for she has written of the workaday world, of places and people she herself has known and loved. And yet there is not the slightest doubt in my mind that the Nebraska of 'O Pioneers' and 'My Ántonia' belongs to the glamorous world of which I have spoken. Hers must be a high and

unique gift, for she has the power to make us doubt in which of these worlds we are, so strangely do they partake of the qualities of both. I believe it would be hard to find in all the realm of art, a picture of a country town in the grip of winter to be compared with this one:

One January day, thirty years ago, the little town of Hanover, anchored on a windy Nebraska tableland, was trying not to be blown away. A mist of fine snowflakes was curling and eddying about the cluster of low drab buildings huddled on the gray prairie, under a gray sky. The dwelling-houses were set about haphazard on the tough prairie sod; some of them looked as if they had been moved in overnight, and others, as if they were straying off by themselves, headed straight for the open plain. None of them had any appearance of permanence, and the howling wind blew under them as well as over them. The main street was a deeply rutted road, now frozen hard, which ran from the squat red railway station and the grain 'elevator' at the north end of the town to the lumber yard and the horse pond at the south end. On either side of this road straggled two uneven rows of wooden buildings; the general merchandise stores, the two banks, the drug store, the feed store, the saloon, the post-office. The board sidewalks were gray with trampled snow, but at two o'clock in the afternoon the shopkeepers, having come back from dinner, were keeping well behind their frosty windows. The children were all in school, and there was nobody abroad in the streets but a few rough-looking countrymen in coarse overcoats, with their long caps pulled down

to their noses. Some of them had brought their wives to town, and now and then a red or a plaid shawl flashed out of one store into the shelter of another. At the hitch-bars along the street a few heavy work-horses harnessed to farm wagons, shivered under their blankets. About the station everything was quiet, for there would not be another train in until night.

Is there glamour here? To me it seems a picture composed of the very stuff of glamour, and at the same time, how faithful it is to reality! I go again and again to Hanover, and Blackhawk, Nebraska, even in the winter time when they are to be seen at their bleakest, in the cold light of snowy afternoons.

It is fortunate that Miss Cather's youth was spent where it was. She saw the prairies before their wild beauty had wholly passed. Hundreds of others, men and women, had seen them as well and long before her time. But she alone, it seems to me, has been able to recreate them, to make others feel their immensity — how lonely and silent they were, and how lonely people felt there as they gazed from the doorways of sod-houses and dugouts over a land that was nothing but land; 'not a country, but the material from which countries are made.' It was changing, of course, as she watched it. The stream of incoming settlers was growing larger year by year. But the prairie

was still the great reality. The human figures moving across it, although dwarfed to insignificance on the vast plains, were still conspicuous because they were so few.

It rarely happens that any country, or section of a country, has an interpreter so sensitive to its beauty as to seem a mere passive instrument for all the seasons to ring their changes on. Miss Cather has loved with such passion and sincerity both the large aspects of nature and the intimate, significant details, that she is able to accomplish with ease the most difficult of artistic tasks: she can recapture the very spirit of time and place, and make you feel as she felt on certain memorable days of her childhood and youth.

'My Ántonia' is a continuous record of such days: April mornings when 'the buffalo peas were blooming in pink and purple masses along the roadside, and the larks, perched on last year's dried sunflower stalks, were singing straight at the sun'; midsummer days 'of breathless brilliant heat, when it seemed as if we could hear the corn growing in the night, and under the stars one caught a faint crackling in the dewy, heavy-odored cornfields where the feathered stalks stood so juicy and green'; windy autumn days when as far as the eye could see the whole country

seemed to be in motion; cloudless winter afternoons when 'the air had the burning taste of fresh snow, and the cornfields got back a little of their color under the dazzling light, and stood the palest possible gold in the sun.'

But there is one of the autumn days which I remember with particular pleasure, and Miss Cather's account of it shows, I think, that the light of glamour is the light of truth itself. Jim Burden is recalling his childhood when he and Ántonia used to wander together over the prairie, and he gave her lessons in English:

> One afternoon we were having our reading lesson on the warm grassy bank where the badger lived. It was a day of amber sunlight, but there was a shiver of coming winter in the air. I had seen ice on the little horse pond that morning, and as we went through the garden we found the tall asparagus with its red berries, lying on the ground, a mass of slimy green.
>
> Tony was barefooted, and she shivered in her cotton dress and was comfortable only when we were tucked down on the baked earth, in the full blaze of the sun. . . . While we were lying there against the warm bank, a little insect of the palest, frailest green hopped painfully out of the buffalo grass and tried to leap into a bunch of bluestem. He missed it, fell back, and sat with his head sunk between his long legs, his antennæ quivering, as if he were waiting for something to come and finish him. Tony made a warm nest for him in her hands; talked to him gayly and indulgently in

Bohemian. Presently he began to sing for us— a thin, rusty little chirp. She held him close to her ear and laughed, but a moment afterward I saw there were tears in her eyes. She told me that in her village at home there was an old beggar woman who went about selling roots and herbs she had dug up in the forest. If you took her in and gave her a warm place by the fire, she sang old songs to the children in a cracked voice, like this. Old Hata she was called, and the children loved to see her coming and saved their cakes and sweets for her.

When the bank on the other side of the draw began to throw a narrow shelf of shadow, we knew we ought to be starting homeward; the chill came on quickly when the sun got low, and Ántonia's dress was thin. What were we to do with the frail little creature we had lured back to life with false pretenses? I offered my pockets, but Tony shook her head and carefully put the green insect in her hair, tying her big handkerchief loosely over her curls. I said I would go with her until we could see Squaw Creek, and then turn and run home. We drifted along lazily, very happy, through the magical light of late afternoon. . . .

We had been silent a long time, and the sun sank nearer and nearer the prairie floor when we saw a figure moving on the edge of the upland, a gun over his shoulder. He was walking slowly, dragging his feet along as if he had no purpose. We broke into a run to overtake him.

'My papa sick all the time,' Tony panted as we flew. 'He not look good, Jim.'

As we neared Mr. Shimerda she shouted, and he lifted up his head and peered about. Tony ran up to him, caught his hand and pressed it against her cheek.

She was the only one of his family who could rouse the old man from the torpor in which he seemed to live. He took the bag from his belt and showed us three rabbits he had shot, looking at Ántonia with a wintry flicker of a smile and began to tell her something. She turned to me.

'My *tatinek* make me little hat with the skins, little hat for win-ter!' she exclaimed joyfully. 'Meat for eat, skin for hat,' — she told of these benefits on her fingers.

Her father put his hand on her hair, but she caught his wrist and lifted it carefully away, talking to him rapidly. I heard the name of old Hata. He untied the handkerchief, separated her hair with his fingers, and stood looking down at the green insect. When it began to chirp faintly, he listened as if it were a beautiful sound. . . . We stood there in the friendly silence while the feeble minstrel went on with its scratchy chirp. The old man's smile as he listened, was so full of sadness, of pity for things, that I never afterward forgot it. As the sun sank there came a sudden coolness and the strong smell of earth and drying grass. Ántonia and her father went off hand in hand, and I buttoned up my jacket and raced my shadow home.

Times change and people and places change with them in the world of getting and spending. I should not be surprised to learn that there is now a filling-station or a moving-picture theater on the very spot where this scene took place. Well, if there should be it doesn't greatly matter. Miss Cather's prairie still exists in the glamorous

world, and I go there often on this same autumn afternoon. And always I find three lonely figures outlined against the sky as evening comes on — two children and an old man, listening as if it were a beautiful sound to the faint chirping of a little green insect.

IX

LEVITICUS REDIVIVUS

I DOUBT whether many people could be found in these unregenerate days, even among the clergy, who could recite, offhand, the eleventh chapter of the Book of Leviticus. Imagine, then, landing at a tiny atoll in the South Pacific, to find the brown-skinned inhabitants gathered in the shade, quoting from memory, one after the other, this fragment of Old Testament history. And not only the eleventh chapter, but the entire twenty-seven, and going on, I believe, with increasing zest, through Numbers, Deuteronomy, Judges, Kings. I had this experience, and I confess that I was surprised. It happened at the island of Reka-Reka, where, as I was to find, Sampson's battle with the Philistines is as fresh a topic of conversation as though it had happened last week, and where the genealogy of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, sons of Noah, is the familiar nursery rhyme of children in arms.

I had never heard of Reka-Reka until the day when I first saw it, a low fringe of land rising from the sea about eight miles to leeward of the trading

schooner on which I was traveling. We were on our way to the Gambier Islands at the time, but being close in, the captain altered the course.

'We might as well call there,' he said, 'but I'm not sure that it will be safe to send a boat ashore. Bad reef. But maybe we can manage it on the lee side.'

'How are the natives — friendly?' I asked, for this happened at a time when I was new to the South Seas, and had more or less conventional ideas about their inhabitants.

'Friendly? Lord, yes! You might go ashore with Willie if you want to. If you can manage the landing it will be worth your while. Ain't that so, Willie?'

Willie, the supercargo, a weather-mellowed little Scotchman of fifty, agreed gravely that this was true.

'Aye,' he said, gazing toward the land. 'They're queer places, some of these islands, but not so queer as the ideas folks at home have about them. I suppose a good many think these natives are still pure heathens, and like enough they are in some ways. But they're terrible religious, and fair marvels at the Scriptures. You see, they have but the one book, the Bible. It was translated into their language by some of the

old missionaries, and they've read it and studied it and learnt it by heart. For downright knowledge of it they haven't their equals anywhere, not even in Scotland.'

I was much interested. I had often — who has not? — discussed with friends the choice of a book to be taken if one were to be marooned for life on a lonely island and could have but one volume. There is always a wide variety of opinion as to the one likely to prove most satisfactory in the long run, and it ranges from a one-volume edition of Shakespeare, to the New York City Directory, or a Montgomery-Ward catalogue. Here was an island where the inhabitants had but one book, the Bible, and if Willie were to be believed, their knowledge of it would put to shame the most erudite professors of Divinity.

When we were close in-shore the schooner's whale-boat was lowered, and with Willie at the steering oar, and four Polynesian sailors pulling like mad, we were caught by a huge comber and carried safely across the reef. No one met us at the landing-place. The village was a mile and a half distant, toward the windward side of the island. Leaving the sailors behind, Willie and I set out in that direction.

The land itself was a mere fringe of coral gravel,

not more than a quarter of a mile wide, well planted to coconut palms, and completely encircling the lagoon. Willie told me that the rats ate most of the nuts. The natives cared little about their potential wealth, and made only enough copra to provide for their modest needs. Occasionally they would dry a few tons of it to be exchanged for tinned beef and salmon, a few bolts of print-cloth for the women, and dungaree trousers and cotton undershirts for the Sunday wear of the men; but that was about the limit of their purchases.

'Not much use calling here,' he added. 'I suppose I've landed at Reka-Reka ten times in the last fifteen years, and the business I've done wouldn't amount to one hundred pounds, all told.'

A few chickens, startled at our approach, took the air with a whirr of wings, like so many partridges, and circling far above us, settled in the tops of the trees. It was curious to see once-domesticated fowl so strong in flight, so far from even the semblance of a barnyard. But it was no more curious, I suppose, than that people should be living on these fragments of land, thousands of miles from any continent. The chickens, of course, had been brought here, but how had the

people come, in the first instance, and what was the land of their origin? And how lonely their lives, looking out at dawn over the same empty sea, watching, at dusk, the brightening constellations reflected from the placid lagoon — cut off from the rest of the world almost as completely as though they were inhabitants of another planet. But they were widely traveled, Willie said, within the limits of their own archipelago.

'There's only about forty people here, and they belong for the most part to three families. You might think they would be poor stock, a run-down, degenerate lot, but they're not. There is no inter-marriage. The girls are taken by the men of other islands, and the men here often make long voyages in search of wives. I know of places in more civilized parts of the world where they are nothing like so careful about in-breeding. If one of these natives was to marry his cousin, he would be ostracized by the rest of his family, and so far as I can learn, they were even more particular about this in the old days than they are now. You've probably heard how good they are at reciting their family histories? They can tell you their descent from away back. Well, naturally, they take a lot of interest in the family histories of the Old Testament folks, and I've learned, mostly

from the natives themselves, that marriages between some pretty close blood relations are told about in the Bible. They are great hands at finding these out, and they spend a lot of time puzzling over the genealogies. And the other things they find to argue about in the Scriptures! Knotty problems! It would make your head swim to hear them sometimes. But wait! They couldn't have seen us coming in, and like as not there'll be some kind of a Bible class in session.'

He was right. There was. We approached the village, a cluster of a dozen or more huts, under cover of some shrubbery, and looked on for a moment, unobserved. The village street was wide and well shaded, and in the center of it, on a circle of mats spread out on the clean coral sand, men and women were listening to an old patriarch who was declaiming with grave eloquence. Most of them were at work while they listened, the women plaiting straw for hats, or making shell wreaths which are worn around them on windy days; the men polishing the long poles of their fishing-spears, fashioning pearl-shell hooks, used in bonito fishing, or braiding coconut fiber for canoe lashings. All of them were silent and attentive, save only the younger children playing about the outskirts of the crowd, just such

bundles of energy as are all children the world over. Willie was as pleased as though this were a spectacle which he had arranged for my particular benefit.

'You see?' he whispered. 'What did I tell you? They're quoting Scripture. I expect they've been at it all day. I don't suppose you would have believed this if you hadn't seen it?'

Just then we were discovered by one of the children and came forth from our hiding-place. The meeting was interrupted for a few moments while Willie gave them the news of the other islands. Then he turned to me.

'It's as I expected,' he said. 'There's no copra ready, but we might as well stay for an hour or so. The chief wants to know whether you mind if they go on with the speaking?'

'Mind!' I said. 'Please tell him that I should like very much to listen.'

'I have told him already. It's a contest they're having, the three best Scripture scholars on the island. They're in Leviticus now, but they've come all the way from Exodus since the morning. As I said, they're fair marvels at it.'

I understood little or nothing of the language, but I enjoyed listening to the musical flow of the words. One after the other the three contestants

recited from memory, chapter after chapter, the old chief, with a well-thumbed Tahitian Bible on his lap, acting as judge and checking the mistakes. By his side were three half-shells of coconut nuts, and when a contestant made an error, a pebble was dropped into his shell. There was an old lady sitting near me, her eyes shut, making cats-cradles with a piece of string stretched over her hands. One would have thought she was all but asleep, but every now and then she would lift her head quickly and say, 'Tera!' (There!) noting an error in the recital before any one else had marked it.

I was beginning to wonder how many chapters there were in Leviticus, when there was a brief recess. Green drinking nuts were brought for refreshment, the youngsters shinning up the trees like monkeys on a stick and dropping the fresh nuts all around us. The chief spoke to Willie at some length. When he had finished, Willie turned to me.

'They want you to recite,' he said.

'Recite! What? Not from Leviticus?' I replied in alarm.

'No, no! Of course not. Some story about America. You know how these natives are: they have any amount of legends about their history

and they think we have too. It doesn't make any difference what you say — none of them understand English. But recite something. It will please them and they expect it. Don't you know any poetry?'

I knew a good deal of verse of one kind or another, but as it usually happens on such occasions, my mind was a blank. I could think of nothing at the moment, and in considerably less than a moment everything was quiet, every one waiting for me to begin. Then, as luck would have it, there came into mind the first stanza of a ballad which was legendary enough, and although I was ashamed to recite it on such an occasion I was compelled to for lack of something more appropriate. So I began,

> A capital ship for an ocean trip
> Was the walloping Window-Blind;
> No wind that blew dismayed the crew
> Or troubled the captain's mind.
> The man at the wheel was made to feel
> Contempt for the wildest blow,
> And it often appeared when the weather had cleared
> That he'd been in his bunk, below.

Once started the whole of the ballad reeled itself off without a halt, to the end. The Reka-Rekans seemed to be pleased. I noticed, however, that the chief's mind was still on the Scripture contest,

for he continued to read his Bible; but he looked in my direction several times, nodding with smiling approval. I felt, as I say, thoroughly ashamed of myself. There was I, a member of a so-called superior race, imposing in this cheap manner on an audience of so-called savages. They thought I was telling some old tale of my forefathers, and although they could not understand, they gave me courteous attention. Willie made me feel guiltier still when he told me that he explained to the chief that the story was about a vessel whose sailors went mad with thirst at sea.

The contest was then resumed, but an hour before sundown Willie and I were compelled to return to the schooner. We had a good deal of difficulty in getting off the reef, but managed it at last, and when well off-shore the sailors rested on their oars, waiting for the vessel to come up. Willie was silent, busy with his own thoughts, which were amusing ones to judge by the expression on his face. Then he chuckled softly.

'I didn't want to tell you before,' he said, 'but you know, it *was* Leviticus you were supposed to be reciting — the eleventh chapter. The old chief — now wait! Let me explain! You don't understand! You see, in some of these islands a man is nothing at all if he doesn't know the Bible. It's

about the only way they have of judging him, intellectually, I mean. You must have made a good impression on the chief because he simply took it for granted that you are a scripture scholar. He wanted you to recite a part of that chapter so they would know how it sounded in English. You say you expect to stay in this part of the world for a while, and maybe you'll come back to Reka-Reka some time. If you do — you see? — you'll have some standing with the elders. They'll think you're as good a Bible scholar as they are, if not better.'

I forgave Willie in the end, but I doubt whether I would ever be forgiven by the Reka-Rekans if they knew. Later, as a silent apology to them, I read the whole of Leviticus, and I was interested to find that the fourth chapter is concerned with the sacrificial offerings to be made by those who have committed sins of ignorance.

This could only have happened in the South Seas. As the French, who own Reka-Reka, might say, '*Dans l'Océanie on fait son impossible.*'

X

SOME ISLAND GRANDMOTHERS

I

ONE snowy December afternoon I paid a visit to an American grandmother who lived alone in one of those spacious old houses, built in the early eighteen-eighties, which are still occasionally to be seen in middle-western towns. I had come to bid her good-bye before setting out on another journey to the South Seas, and I found her sitting by a bright fire, with a book on her lap, and several others on the floor beside her.

'You see?' she said, holding up the volume; 'I'm having a fireside journey to your islands; but I wish I were going with you! And I would go if I were ten years younger — you'd have to take me!' She gave a wistful sigh as she looked out at the wide, snowy street. Then, glancing at her book, she became her eager, cheery self again.

'There's something I wish you would do for me,' she said. 'I should like to know all about the old ladies of those islands — the grandmothers, and the great-grandmothers if there are any. These men,' indicating the books at her side,

'speak mostly of the young women, and they must be delightful creatures by all accounts. But so must the grandmothers be, and you must cultivate them. Then, when you come home again, we will have just such another afternoon as this, and I shall expect to hear all about them.'

During two years of desultory wandering which followed, I kept a notebook in the form of a letter to this grandmother, meaning to send it, or better, to bring it to her at last. But I waited too long. I still have the notebook, and knowing that it would please her, I shall give here some extracts from it, very nearly as they were set down at the time.

II

If you will take your atlas, I will tell you where I am, and what I have been doing this long afternoon. Do you find the Paumotu, or the Low Archipelago? It is scattered over a thousand miles of ocean, so it must take up a little space on your map. Follow it down a little more than halfway toward the southeastern extremity, and see if you can find an island named Taueri, or it may be marked, Saint Simon, or Resolution Island. It is a tiny fragment of land with only a handful of inhabitants living in a village of about

a dozen houses scattered along the lagoon beach. The ocean beach is wide and lonely, and there, this afternoon, I met a very charming South-Sea-Island grandmother.

I was having a leisurely stroll, and had gone two miles or more beyond the village, when I heard some one singing, and the song was '*Au Clair de la Lune.*' It gave me something of a thrill to hear that old song on an atoll, so far from the home of its origin, and I was even more surprised when I saw the singer, a native woman of about sixty. She was dressed in one of those black mother-hubbards introduced by the missionaries many years ago, as a more seemly costume for women than the native one. They are still worn by island grandmothers in these out-of-the-way places, and when tastefully made they suit them very well. This grandmother was plaiting coconut-palm fronds, to be used in thatching a little hut near by. Her husband was building the house in which they were to live while making copra at this end of the island.

This she told me after bidding me good-day in French, with charming dignity and courtesy. Then she motioned me to sit down beside her. She told me that she was not a native of Taueri but of Manga Reva, an island far to the south-

east, where formerly the French missionaries had excellent schools both for boys and girls. She had lived there till the time of her marriage when she had gone to Tahiti, and later to Taueri.

I don't remember how the subject came up, but within a quarter of an hour we were talking of ghosts and spirits — *tupaupau* as they are called here — as easily and naturally as we might have spoken of fishing or mat-weaving. She recited story after story of supernatural happenings, some of which she had witnessed, and told them with a forcefulness of effect which I cannot hope to convey to you. But one of them I can set down very nearly in her own words:

'My uncle, my mother's brother, was named Tané. He was one of the best divers in Manga Reva. He could not dive so deep as some, but he could stay longer under water and gather more pearl-shell than any of them. One day the men went to dive in a distant part of the lagoon, and I was with my mother in the village, braiding fronds like these.

'Suddenly my mother said, "Aué! What is this?" and I saw that the frond we were braiding was sprinkled with drops of blood. My mother asked me whether I had cut my hand I and said no. "Come," she said. "Something has happened

to one of our family," and we hurried to the place where the men were diving for pearl-shell. On the way we met those who were carrying my uncle home. His body and one of his legs had been terribly torn by a shark, and he was dead.'

She told me too, of the spirit of her mother, who had died shortly afterward. She said that she often saw her mother's ghost, sitting on the beach combing her hair, or braiding fronds, or gathering ripe coconuts in the groves. All through the afternoon we sat on the beach looking out over the vast plain of the sea, ruffled to a deeper blue by the southeast wind, I listening to tales that seemed easily credible in that lonely spot. The grandmother believed them, there is no doubt of it. I wished that I might have assumed her personality for a moment to learn how it was that she was able to persuade herself to such beliefs.

Toward sunset I went back with her to the village where I met her husband, a stalwart old man with a thick shock of iron-gray hair, and two of her family of five sons. All of her sons were married, but three of them lived on distant islands. Her house is a tiny one, the usual thatched hut of plaited palm fronds, containing but one room and furnished with the usual sewing-machine and two or three chests for clothing. On the walls were

several colored lithographs illustrating incidents in the life of Christ. Back of the dwelling-house was a small out-kitchen opened at the sides. Here the grandmother, with the help of her two daughters-in-law, prepared supper while we looked on from the doorstep.

There was not a great variety of food, but one doesn't expect it on an atoll hundreds of miles from a steamship route. We had fish, hard biscuits, and coffee, with a tin of bully-beef, opened, undoubtedly, in my honor! Tinned beef is a costly luxury in this part of the world. I thought how keenly interested you would have been could you have looked in on us at supper. The fish was raw for the most part, and we ate it with our fingers, dipping the morsels into a bowl of sauce made of the grated meat of ripe coconuts and flavored with salt. Coconut milk — without the salt of course — is delicious in coffee, far better than condensed milk. It colors it a rich, golden brown, like the best jersey cream.

Supper was soon over, and as there were only four dishes to wash, and one knife which had been used in cutting up the fish, the women were not long at their task of clearing up, and joined us on the lagoon beach. The grandmother brought with her a cake of black Tahitian tobacco and a

long strip of dried pandanus-leaf. She peeled off a leaf of the tobacco, dried it over a coal, and rolled it in a piece of pandanus-leaf, making thus a cigarette for each of us. Smoking is not a new thing among Polynesian women, although, as at home, not all women indulge in it. One cigarette lasts for about half a dozen puffs which is quite long enough for any one not used to native tobacco.

At first there was a good deal of talk (in the native tongue, not in French); then, as the dusk deepened, every one became silent, looking out over the lagoon to the far side of the atoll, where several small islets could be seen outlined against the evening sky. Presently one of the daughters-in-law began to sing in a clear sweet voice to which I could have listened with pleasure indefinitely. Although she is the mother of two children, I don't think she can be more than eighteen. Hers was just the voice for the place, and the air had the weird cadence of all Polynesian songs. After a few moments the grandmother spoke to her sharply and put an end to the singing. Then she laughed, and turning to me, she asked whether I knew what her daughter-in-law was singing about. I said no.

'Well,' she replied, 'she was making up a song

about you, the little vixen! and this was how it went:

'A man has come to Taueri who is very fond of fish;
It is well that there are many fish in the sea,
For a man has come to Taueri who is very fond of fish.'

While the grandmother was making this translation, the daughter-in-law ran away to her own house, shouting with laughter. It was a good joke on me. I thought she was singing some ancient song of the islands. As a matter of fact, being very hungry, I had eaten a great deal of fish.

So ends the day. I am writing this in my notebook by the light of a fire of coconut husks. There is not a sound to be heard but the eternal booming of the surf on the windward side of the island. The others have gone to bed, but I can't bring myself to follow them. Such a night as this was not meant for sleep. A moment ago a shooting star appeared almost overhead and vanished halfway down the sky.

Now glides the silent meteor on, and leaves
A shining furrow, as thy thoughts in me.

III

From the deck of this ninety-ton schooner I can see on the horizon the summit of the highest mountain of an island which we left yesterday

afternoon. The *Fenua Ro'atu*, the Polynesians call it — The Land Very Far Away — which they shorten for convenience' sake to Roatu. It is not so named on the charts, however. Its British discoverer rechristened it Lord Some One-or-Other's Island, but none of its inhabitants know this, and I have forgotten now, what forgotten lord it was whose name rests so uncouthly on that lonely spot.

I first heard of it from a white man who has spent many years in this part of the world. He is something of a philologist and something of a poet as well, and has a large collection of native legends and songs. Some of these he had translated into French, but it was a task impossible to accomplish well, he said. He told me that his translations were by no means literal ones. I saw some specimens of his work, and the one I liked best was the following, called the 'Song of Roatu,' which I, in turn, translated into English:

Go no further, wanderers, go no further;
This is Ro'atu, the farthest land, long-sought-for,
Where the bright fish leap in the lagoon
And the breadfruit ripens in the sun.

Go no further, wanderers, this is the land;
Behold it gazing forever at its image in still water.
This is the land of long sunshine
And of gentle rains at night.

Here the plantains flower and bear fruit and flower again;
In the green gloom of the valleys
There is heard only the music of running water,
And the windy grasses nod on the high plateaus.

These are the voices of Roatu:
The shouts of the children at play,
The roar of the surf on the reef,
And the wind in the fronds of the palms.

I was charmed by this little song which was sung, he told me, to music as weird and lonely as any he had ever heard.

'You should go there sometime,' he said. 'It is still quite unspoiled, and there are very few islands of which that can be said any more.'

I did go, at last, and for the opportunity I was indebted to an old friend, Chan Lee, skipper of the Toafa, who little cares how far he goes in search of island commodities. He is an affable old Chinaman, but he never talks of his business, and during this voyage, never on any occasion did he tell me whither we were bound. This suited me precisely. It gave an added zest to our haphazard wanderings not to know where we might fetch up.

One evening — it must have been about nine o'clock — I was lying in my bunk reading 'Don Quixote,' when Chan came down the companionway.

'You want see nice island?' he said. 'Fine weather now. Bimeby go shore.'

I went on deck at once, for we had been nearly a week at sea since our last call, and I had not even guessed at a possible destination. It had been raining during the early part of the evening, but now all the stars were out. A light breeze was blowing off-shore, and we were moving across what seemed to be an immense bay. On one side the coastline was barely visible, but on the other the jagged outline of the mountains stood out clearly against the sky.

Such a landfall, made on a cloudless tropic night, is assuredly one of the happiest of experiences. This is particularly true if the approach is to an island far from any others. And it is not the distant view which you remember most vividly, but the near approach, when the land breeze blows, now cool and damp from the depths of the valleys, now warm and laden with the unfamiliar odors of the littoral. You hear the barking of a dog, or a faint halloo from shore; lights are seen moving among the trees; the shadows of the mountains deepen on the water, and from this deeper gloom the shoreline begins vaguely to emerge. During this time the place is still a creation of fancy. A narrowing strip of water still divides the reality

from the ideal conception, and until that is crossed both the place and the people who inhabit it have an existence apart — unreal, unspoiled, soon to vanish.

And yet not always, or at least not wholly to vanish, and I had a premonition that this would be true of the island at hand. It was as familiar to me in the ideal sense as many a well-loved landscape at home. The moment I saw it, dim and shadowy under the stars, I knew it for the island I had dreamed of since boyhood. Chan told me that it was Roatu, and then he was moved to make what was for him a very long speech.

'Vely plitty island,' he said. 'I like come here. Plenty food, plenty quiet.'

For an hour we coasted along a barrier reef where the surf broke gently. Then, through a narrow pass we entered a lagoon so calm that it seemed a nether sky, with the white smoke of the Milky Way making a faint radiance in the water, like the blurred reflection of a streamer of moonlit cloud. We passed a rocky headland and crept inshore. No lights were to be seen now, for the shoulder of a mountain cut off the view of the inner beach where the village lay. As the anchor was let go I heard a shout from the darkness close at hand, and at the same moment torches were lit

in a fleet of canoes awaiting our approach. The effect was spectacular and marvelously beautiful. The lagoon was lighted far and wide, and I saw that we were lying in a narrow bay, steep mountain walls enclosing us on two sides. A little to the left a river entered the bay, and high overhead a deep notch of starry sky marked the direction of the valley from which it came.

Other canoes rounded the promontory, and the surface of the water was dotted with the heads of small boys swimming out to us from shore. Chan gave these water-sprites the freedom of the vessel. Indeed, there was no help for it, for they clambered up the sides without waiting for an invitation, overrunning the schooner from stem to stern. They had brought with them, in a canoe, some torches of their own, made of bunches of dried palm fronds tied to the ends of sticks. As soon as the sails were furled they swarmed with these up the rigging to the cross-trees, where they lighted them and leaped far out, disappearing in the water like a succession of small meteors.

Two old ladies — I am sure they were grandmothers — were sitting in a canoe close by, chatting comfortably as they looked on. Of a sudden some boys in the water grasped the outrigger of their canoe, bore down on it, and spilled them

both out. This seemed to be a quite legitimate joke to play on Roatu grandmothers. Every one yelled with delight, and certainly these two grandmothers were well able to take care of themselves. They came up, sputtering and scolding, and although hindered by their mother-hubbards, they righted the canoe, swished the water out by jerking it back and forth, and clambered in again. They laughed and scolded in the same breath, but they were more wary after that, laying about them with their paddles whenever a head bobbed up near by.

When we went ashore, a great fire was lighted near the beach in the midst of a grove of very ancient palm trees, and the village gathered there to listen to the reading of a small packet of letters we had brought. There must have been nearly a hundred people present, exclusive of the children. Those who had received letters read them aloud, for the news received in one family was of interest to all of the others. But little comment was made by the listeners. Some of the women cried a little, thinking, perhaps, of sons and daughters who had left the island at the time of their marriage, whom they had not seen in many years, and of grandchildren, nephews, and nieces whom they might never see. But they had little conception, I

think, of the loneliness of their lives as it appealed to an outsider. It was something they had always known, and most of them, doubtless, thought theirs the common fate of mankind the world over.

When the letters had been read, I went to the house of the chief of the settlement, a man named Rogotangi. I had a letter to him from one of his relatives whom I met on another island, and he no sooner learned that I wanted to make a sojourn of several weeks, than he was going to bundle all of his family out of his house and turn it over to me. I protested against this excess of hospitality, and at length persuaded him to let me sleep on the veranda, a small corner of it being all the house-room I needed. His house was the simplest kind of island dwelling and stood at the end of the village street near the church. Upon our arrival there we found two old women, the mothers of Rogotangi and of Temehau, his wife, seated cross-legged on the floor with a kerosene lamp between them. One of them was braiding straw for hats, and the other was making a *tifaifai*, a kind of a bed quilt. They were the most inquisitive, as well as the jolliest pair of grandmothers I've met thus far. Rogotangi's mother spoke French, after a fashion, and it was she who did the quizzing. They wanted first to know why I had come to the

island. Then they asked my name, my mother's name, my father's name, and those of all brothers and sisters. What was the color of my mother's hair? Was she fat or slender? Was I married? Were my brothers and sisters married? How many children did each of them have and what were their names? How far was it to my home? etc., etc. Their curiosity was insatiable, and whenever I gave them the slightest opportunity they proceeded with the examination.

Meanwhile I settled down to the dreamiest sort of life. I lounged in the shade; I explored the valley, or made day-long excursions to the high, fern-covered plateaus which extend far inland, and look like smooth, gently sloping lawns when viewed from a distance. The evenings I spent, partly in watching the children at play, and partly in cultivating the grandmothers, according to your instructions. Near the church was a smooth grass plot, a favorite resort of the children in the cool of the day. I learned there something about their games. Some of them may date back to immemorial times, but most of them are those common to children the world over. The boys and girls both walk on stilts, and the short, bound-on sticks we used to call 'duck-legs.' They play tag, which they call 'peré-haru,' the catching-game;

and 'peré parié' is only another name for prisoner's-base. Besides these they play blind-man's-buff, jack-stones, and hop-scotch. To decide who shall be 'it,' they count out in an archaic little rhyme, centuries older, it may be, than our 'Eeny-meeny-mynee-mo.' The very small children have a game which is also very familiar. They call it 'imi piri' — seeking for the hidden thing. A child takes a pebble, hides it in one hand, and holds out both fists while he recites a little rhyme, challenging the others to guess in which hand the pebble is held. This is the rhyme:

Vini vini Vairao,
Taputai, farero,
Teihia ra t'au piri?

and aside from two nonsense words, it means: 'Parakeet from Vairao, where is my hidden pebble?' The one who is to do the guessing then feels of the challenger's ears and strikes the fist on the side of the warmest ear.

Having so many pastimes common to all children, I was surprised to learn that they were ignorant of one of the most fascinating of them all — soap-bubble blowing. Apparently they had never heard of it. It was high time, therefore, that this ancient diversion was introduced; and fate, surely, was in the event, for Soo Long, store-

keeper, and the only Chinaman on the island, had a box of clay pipes. Judging from the appearance of the box they were in, they must have been lying on his shelf for years, awaiting their destiny as makers of magic.

Think of introducing such a pastime in a village full of Polynesian children! What better fortune could one ask? I prepared a bowl of soapy water and carried it to the steps in front of the church, the children crowding around to see what was going to happen. It was a calm evening, with an imperceptible current of air which carried the bubbles slowly upward, glowing with all the colors of the sunset, until they burst high overhead among the fronds of the palms. For a moment the children gazed at them with a rapt expression on their faces, as though they had divined at once, instinctively, that a soap-bubble is an ideal form of beauty — a symbol of perfection. Then they were but clamorous children, eager to make bubbles for themselves; so I distributed the rest of the pipes and sat down to watch them. I shall never think of this village without seeing it in the mellow light of a waning afternoon, the air filled with soap-bubbles, and small children, shouting with delight, chasing them over a smooth lawn. They seemed creatures of pure enchant-

ment, and the island itself only a huge bubble, created but that moment out of a dream.

Fortunately it was an island solid underfoot, where people ate, and slept, and fished, and made copra, and washed clothes — particularly the latter. The women were at their outdoor laundry on the river-bank every morning at dawn, and there were always some grandmothers among them, beating the clothes with their wooden paddles almost as vigorously as the younger women. They are a cleanly race, these islanders. Most of them bathe morning and evening — in the streams, rarely in the sea — and the women seem to be forever washing clothes or ironing them. The irons they use are heated by a fire of bark from the coconut palm. The trees in the vicinity of any Polynesian village bear witness to the passion of the natives for clean, freshly laundered clothing. You will not find one that has not been chipped and scarred for bark on all sides, to the height of a woman's head.

The ironing appears to be largely a grandmotherly task. Having sprinkled down the clothes, and started the little fires going in their irons, they spread an ironing-cloth on the floor and sit cross-legged before it. This appears to be the most awkward and uncomfortable position

possible for such work, but evidently it is not. Polynesians are more supple-limbed than we are, and their joints have freer play. The women always iron while sitting on the floor, and it is surprising to see how long they keep at it without showing the least sign of fatigue.

I remember that you wanted to know what these island grandmothers talk about. About everything under the sun, I should say; I marvel that they have anything left to discuss in these little settlements where most of the inhabitants were born and have lived all their lives. And yet I have often seen a pair of grandmothers sitting over their ironing, all the afternoon, talking as volubly and with as much animation as though they had just met after years of separation. Each of them must know all there is to be known about every one else in the village, and what they find to gossip about with such interest remains a mystery to me.

IV

A year ago to-day I was chatting with you in your sitting-room, listening to the pleasant crackling of the fire, and looking out at the snowy street where there was not a single passer-by all the afternoon. Now, looking up from my notebook, I

see, across the waters of this little land-locked bay, mountains green to their summits, enclosing a deep valley half hidden in tropical vegetation. What a variety of experience one may have at the cost of a little movement! However, in this case the movement has been to a considerable distance, something over six thousand miles.

After a year's experience among Polynesian grandmothers, I feel competent to set up as an authority on the subject. What numbers of them I've met, some grave and reserved in speech and action, some jolly, and full of life and spirits, some a little shrewish and harsh-tempered, but most of them with the gentleness and charm of manner which they have in common with grandmothers the world over.

But I know that you like accounts of specific experiences rather than these generalizations, so I will tell you of one of the most interesting of them while it is still freshly in mind; for I have been celebrating this anniversary by paying a visit to a lady who is a unique kind of island grandmother. She is not Polynesian at all, but an American — can you imagine it? — an American grandmother tucked away in this remote corner of the world which seems to belong to some other planet.

The captain of the trading-schooner on which

I have been traveling since November, told me about her. She is the wife of another skipper, an American long since dead, who brought her to the islands forty years ago. He built a home for her on this island, and here she has been living ever since, without ever having returned to the little New England town where she was born. I was keenly interested, of course, the more so because I couldn't imagine what sort of an effect this lonely, mid-tropical environment would have in the making of an American grandmother. Would she be true to type, or would forty years of exile have made her a grandmother of a wholly different kind? I was thinking of this as I rowed ashore this morning to pay my respects.

Thirty or forty years ago this village was a flourishing little settlement, with a colony of English, French, and American merchants and planters, a good school, a club, and cool, spacious government buildings. There was life and movement here, and ships in the harbor, and lively talk on the verandas of an evening, over cigars and coffee. Now it is deserted, silent, falling in ruin. The long sunny street is empty for hours at a time. The jungle has crept down over the old plantations, and the sound of the human voice comes with a strange and startling effect in the uncanny silence of the place.

I soon found the house I was looking for. It might have been lifted out of almost any New England village. There must have been a shingle roof at one time, but this had been replaced by one of thatch which gave it an odd appearance, heightened by two hibiscus bushes, full of red blossoms, on either side of the doorway. They should have been lilac bushes, of course, and the house seemed to be conscious of this. It seemed to be making a wistful appeal to one to overlook these exotic makeshifts, as much as to say, 'I hope you'll excuse this outlandish covering I've got over me, and these strange-looking bushes. It ain't what I've a right to expect; but Lord! here I am, and I've got to do the best I can with what I can find.'

To one side of the house is a little garden filled with all sorts of tropical flowers, and there I found my grandmother, with a spade in her hand, 'puttering around' among her plants and bushes. That was just the expression she used when she first spoke to me. She is a little woman, about five feet two or three, barefoot, almost as brown as a native, and with white hair which she wears in a single braid down her back. She gave me a very cheery welcome.

'Well, I'm right glad to see you!' she said.

'Joe' (the captain) 'told me he was going to send you over this morning, and the last hour I've been keeping one eye on my work and the other on the gate. Come into the house! I'm just puttering around out here. Land sakes! How long's it been since I've seen anybody from home! You'll have to excuse my English. I've almost forgot how to talk it, a body has so little practice here.'

I thought she spoke it with surprising fluency, and now and then she came out with words and expressions in a homely vernacular pleasant to hear. The little sitting-room was scrupulously clean. There was an old-fashioned bureau in one corner, and a carpet-covered sofa in another; a center table, covered with knick-knacks, in the middle of the room, and a chest of drawers against a wall. All the furniture was in a sad state of repair, and small wonder, for it had been doing service for forty years in a climate none too favorable to the preservation of it.

I spent the morning and stayed to lunch — roasted breadfruit, bananas fried in oil, and a delicious dish of curried shrimps and rice. Beside the grandmother and I, there were her two granddaughters, Nancy and Helen, aged about nine and eleven. The names may call to mind pictures of children whom they would be likely to suit, but

these two are like none of the Nancys or Helens you could imagine. They are black-eyed, black-haired, dark-skinned little creatures in whom it was impossible to see a trace of New England. The grandmother told me something about their mother.

'My son married her right out of the bush, you might say. A body couldn't help loving her, she was such a wild, shy, pretty little thing. She died about two years ago, and I've had the children with me ever since. Dear, dear! How am I ever to bring them up properly? You can see for yourself what little savages they are. I've tried and tried to teach them manners, but it's useless. They have too much of their mother in them. My son and his wife always lived native fashion because she couldn't learn any other. I don't know what's become of him — he's always been a trial. He's somewhere in the islands, I suppose, but I haven't seen him since I took the children.'

She was silent for a moment. Then she said, 'Ain't it queer how things work out? Little I thought when I was a girl that I would ever have two little heathen like these for grandchildren.'

I said that they must be a great comfort to her nevertheless.

'Oh, they are!' she replied. 'I don't know what

I'd do without them; but when I look ahead — what's to become of them? There are no white men for them to marry — not one I should like to see as the husband of either of them. What's left for them?' She shook her head ruefully. 'And my own flesh and blood!' She stared vacantly out of the window, clasping and unclasping her slim brown hands — capable hands, but hardly capable of dealing with such a problem as this. Then she looked at the children and brightened up at once. 'Pshaw! Here I am bothering you with my old woman's troubles, and like enough you have plenty of your own. Would you like to hear them sing? They have very pretty voices.'

I said I should like it very much, so she spoke to them in native, and after a moment of shyness they began. It was an odd, wailing little song, one of their mother's songs, the grandmother said. 'I've tried to teach them "Over the River and Through the Wood," and "Good-Morning Merry Sunshine," songs I used to know when I was a little girl, but they either can't or won't remember them.'

Late in the afternoon I returned to the schooner and have been sitting on deck ever since, writing a few words in my notebook, and then stopping to look toward the beach where a group of native

children were at play. A little while ago they swam out to the schooner, and Nancy and Helen were among them, swimming with ease and grace like the accomplished little water-sprites they are. Then they returned to shore, laughing and shouting to each other all the way. Just now I heard their grandmother calling: 'Nan-cy! He-len! *Haéré mai roto i te faré!*' (Come into the house!) '*É!*' they shouted back — '*Aruéi!*' (Presently; in a moment!) They are gone now, and as we are sailing at dawn to-morrow, I don't suppose that I shall ever see them again.

XI

A PERSON FROM PORLOCK

I HAVE often thought it strange that in all the one hundred and thirty years since he came from Porlock, no one should have tried to discover who this 'person' was. An investigation now would prove difficult; it should have been made a century ago. In the early eighteen-hundreds, to be sure, there were nothing like so many beaters of the hedgerows and copses of Letters as there are to-day, but there were some, and how did they miss starting this fat rabbit which was browsing along the roadside between Porlock and Linton, in Somersetshire — and who knows in what other directions? — to the irreparable damage of the rich preserves of literature? Why wasn't he ferreted out? Why wasn't he caught, drawn, to the life, by the pen of some nineteenth-century Swift; quartered, as he so richly deserved to be, in the stocks of public infamy, and then hanged high on Dunkery Beacon as a warning to all the other rabbits, actual and prospective?

He committed one of the worst offenses recorded in the history of English Literature and

escaped, scot-free. That is why I wish some one would pursue his ghost. His memory is, and has been for years, execrable to me, but one knows so little about him — he is such a ghostly ghost, that there is nothing to grapple with the hooks of a really active disdain. I should like to know what his appearance was, in life, his name, and something of his intimates and associates in the village of Porlock. But above all, I should be grateful for the following particulars: when this wretched shade still walked the earth in the flesh, what was his business? Why did he choose a particular day in the summer of 1797 to set out — for some purpose in connection with this business — along the road which leads from Porlock to Linton? And why, apparently, was it *nobody's* business to stop him before he reached a certain lonely farmhouse at Nether Stowey, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire?

But perhaps I go too fast, and take too much for granted on the part of my reader. He may have forgotten even the little that is known of the person from Porlock. Let me remind him at once, then, that Samuel Taylor Coleridge was the occupant of the remote farmhouse at Nether Stowey, and on that summer day, in 1797, he was engaged in writing 'Kubla Khan.'

I never read the poem without reading as well the note which Coleridge appended to it, in which he explains the circumstances of its composition and why it remains a fragment. And the more I marvel at the richness of fancy displayed in the former, the more I wonder at the noble spirit of resignation so manifest in the latter:

In the summer of the year 1797, the author, then in ill health, had retired to a lonely farm-house between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire. In consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed, from the effect of which he fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance, in 'Purchas's Pilgrimage': 'Here Kubla Khan commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto, and thus ten miles of fertile ground were enclosed with a wall.' The author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines — if that, indeed, can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions — without any sensation or consciousness of effort. On awaking he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink, and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour; and on his return to

the room, found, to his no small surprise and mortification, that though he retained some vague and dim recollection of the purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast, but alas! without the after restoration of the latter. . . .

Few men and no women in the history of English Literature have suffered such a loss as Coleridge suffered on this occasion, but he was such a thoroughly good and gentle man that he could take his loss in this calm spirit. But he was a man after all, and had he not shown resentment against the person who had robbed him of the rest of 'Kubla Khan,' one would think him too charitable to be human. But observe with what restraint he speaks of his loss. Observe, too, what a deadly weapon restraint can be.

The Porlock Person came, as we have been told, on a summer day in 1797. Could it have been a day in July? Could it have been one of the days between the second and the sixteenth of July? If so, then there were accessories before the fact of the robbery — unwilling and very contrite ones we may be sure, but accessories nevertheless and they should be brought to the bar of judgment.

The first is Charles Lamb. He visited Coleridge

during the week of July ninth to sixteenth. But merely to mention the name of Lamb is to acquit him at once. No, no! I would take my oath on it that Elia was not guilty. Had he been at Nether Stowey when the person from Porlock came, we should have had the whole of 'Kubla Khan.' He would not have permitted any one, whatever his business, to disturb Coleridge in the midst of composition. Let me quote from Lamb's letter, written from London early in that July, in which he tells Coleridge that he may be able to visit him. Coleridge had urged him repeatedly to come to Nether Stowey, but Lamb, always short of leisure, had not been able to accept. But at last he writes:

July, 1797, *Thursday*

My Dearest Friend:

I discern a possibility of my paying you a visit next week. May I, can I, shall I come so soon? Have you *room* for me? *leisure* for me? and are you pretty well? Tell me all this honestly — immediately. And by what day coach could I come soonest and nearest to Stowey? A few months hence may suit you better; certainly, me, as well. If so, say so. . . . Here I will leave off, for I dislike to fill up this paper (which involves a question so connected with my heart and soul) with meaner matter, or subjects to me less interesting. I can talk, as I can think, nothing else.

C. Lamb

The man who wrote this letter — who showed

such forethought, delicacy, and consideration in accepting an invitation from his friend — would have known how to protect that friend from interlopers, and I am sure that he would have protected him, had the great occasion risen between the ninth and the sixteenth of July.

The second and third of the possible accessories to the theft were friends as dear to Coleridge as Lamb himself — William and Dorothy Wordsworth. They were with him at Nether Stowey while Lamb was there, and during the whole of the week before. As we know, Miss Wordsworth was devoted to her brother and it is to be expected that she would make her own interests as well as those of everybody else, even, perhaps, including those of Coleridge, subservient to William's. Therefore, if the Porlock person came during the week of July second to ninth, it is more than likely that she did not see him in time to prevent the robbery. Or, if she saw him, she may have been so engrossed in her brother as to have had no thought for Coleridge's danger. As for Wordsworth himself, although he could be a keen enough observer upon occasion, when engaged in composing he would be blind to the external world, seeing nothing but the fancies which flashed upon his inward eye.

His poem, 'The Old Cumberland Beggar,' was composed in 1797. Could he have been working upon that, I wonder, at the time of the robbery? It is possible. Perhaps, after luncheon — Coleridge being slightly indisposed — Wordsworth and his sister had taken a walk along the road toward Porlock, and, upon reaching a sheltered spot, had seated themselves there. While they are thus resting, without speaking, enjoying the drowsy peace of the afternoon, the very person passes, and Miss Wordsworth says, 'I wonder who that can be, William?'

Wordsworth is deep in thought and doesn't hear. Presently he says,

'Dorothy, do you remember the old beggar we used to meet so often in our walks?'

'The old Cumberland beggar? Oh, yes. Of course you mean to write of him, William? I've often wondered why you haven't done so before this.'

'I've been waiting until I was quite sure of him, and of the moral implications of his story. The subject has ripened gradually. I am ready now, I think.'

'Then why not begin at once? Shall it be a long poem?'

'Not particularly. I can easily finish it in an

hour's time. This is a delightful spot, but do you think I shall be safe here from interruption?'

'Do begin! You may depend upon me. I shall see to it that no one disturbs you.'

If only Mrs. Coleridge had been as vigilant in protecting her husband's interests as Miss Wordsworth invariably was in protecting her brother's! But for some reason she was not, and there's an end of the matter.

Wordsworth opens his notebook, and after a moment of reflection, begins:

I saw an aged beggar in my walk;
And he was seated, by the highway side,
On a low structure of rude masonry
Built at the foot of a huge hill, that they
Who lead their horses down the steep rough road
May thence remount at ease. The aged man
Had placed his staff across the broad smooth stone
That overlays the pile; and from a bag
All white with flour, the dole of village dames,
He drew his scraps and fragments, one by one;
And scanned them with a fixed and serious look
Of idle computation.

One feels in this poem a kind of mellow beauty, like that of a late November afternoon, but it does not seem to me to be poetry in the high sense, and I would not exchange the fragment of a line in the fragment of 'Kubla Khan' for the whole of it. Reading it, one is in no doubt that Wordsworth

had, at some time, observed patiently and minutely, the old Cumberland beggar. Why couldn't he have had a single, brief, divining glance for the Somerset robber who was even then approaching Coleridge's doorstep?

Perhaps he did see him and instead of stopping him had merely observed, with the artist's eye, some picturesque rustic effect of gait or dress or carriage. Perhaps he even wrote a poem about him, or made notes for one to be composed later. If so, then this poem must be hidden somewhere in the Complete Works. Here is a small but possibly fruitful field for study for some one who loves curious research.

If it was not 'The Old Cumberland Beggar,' then it may have been 'The Reverie of Poor Susan,' that Wordsworth was composing on this summer day, for that poem, too, was written in 1797. Do you remember it?

At the corner of Wood Street, when daylight appears,
Hangs a thrush that sings loud, it has sung for three years;
Poor Susan has passed by the spot, and has heard
In the silence of morning the song of the bird.

And as these lines were being written, it may be that the Porlock Person had opened the door of Coleridge's study.

'Well, Mr. Coleridge, here you are at your writin'! I hope I'm not disturbin' you? So this is where you make your poetry books! Nice little place you've got here, but it's a tidy way from Porlock. I'm all of a sweat, like. Ain't it hot for the time of year? I didn't have nothin' much to do this afternoon, so I just thought I'd drop in to see you about that ——' etc., etc.

I don't mean to say that he talked like this. Probably he spoke the Somerset dialect, and it may have been something like John Fry's, in 'Lorna Doone,' when he strode into the inn at Dulverton, and shouted, 'as loud as though he were calling sheep upon Exmoor,' 'Hot mooton pasty for twoo trarv'lers, at number vaive, in vaive minnits! Dish un up in the tin with the grahvy, zame as I hardered last Tuesday.' But whatever the dialect, I imagine that what he said must have been substantially as given above.

And there were the Wordsworths, sitting under Coleridge's lime tree in the garden, Miss Dorothy looking from her brother to her sewing and back again, and the poet bent over his manuscript, writing,

> Green pastures she views in the midst of the dale,
> Down which she so often has tripped with her pail;
> And a single small cottage, a nest like a dove's,
> The only one dwelling on earth that she loves.

Had it been:

> The stars of midnight shall be dear
> To her; and she shall lean her ear
> In many a secret place
> Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
> And beauty born of murmuring sound
> Shall pass into her face

he should be forgiven at once, by me at least. But 'The Reverie of Poor Susan'! And we have her to thank as well as the Porlock Person for the loss of 'Kubla Khan'!

But now, unquestionably, I go too fast, letting imagination excite indignation in this fashion, convicting the Wordsworths on evidence which is not even circumstantial. Summer was three months long in the eighteenth century just as it is to-day, and for anything I know to the contrary, the robbery may have occurred in June, or August, or during the last two weeks of July.

And here Coleridge himself admonishes me for the spirit of this inquiry. My copy of his Collected Poems lies open on the table beside me as I write. The window, too, is open, and the warm breeze — as though it felt the impulse of his humane and charitable spirit — has fluttered over the leaves of the volume to his Preface to the poems. My eye falls upon the concluding paragraph:

I expect neither profit nor general fame by my writings; and I consider myself as having been amply repaid without either. Poetry has been to me its own 'exceeding great reward': it has soothed my afflictions; it has multiplied and refined my enjoyments; it has endeared solitude; and it has given me the habit of wishing to discover the good and the beautiful in all that meets and surrounds me.

There speaks the man whom all his friends loved so deeply; who, as we know, both from their testimony and from his own writings, had this rich and generous nature. We all have so many sins to answer for that we should try to think indulgently of the sins of others. But we also have — most of us, surely — our own Porlock Persons to deal with, and they are so lacking even in the rudiments of thoughtfulness and consideration that it is hard to think of them with any kindness. They disturb our meditations, rob us of our precious hours of leisure, interfere with our work, and although this matters nothing, in our cases, to the world at large, it matters a great deal to us. And indeed, it seems to me that to violate any man's privacy — that is, to call upon him unasked, without warning — is to commit the worst in the whole category of inexcusable offenses; and if he be a great artist, as Coleridge was, then the offense becomes a crime, for he is robbing posterity as well.

No one has described the circumstances of such a violation more vividly than Joseph Conrad, in his autobiographical narrative 'A Personal Record.' His Porlock Person was a woman, and you may remember that he calls her 'the general's daughter.' In all probability she is still living — if any one may be said to be living who has been singed and scorched and burned to a cinder by such a blast of ridicule — but in this case I am glad that I do not know her name, and I hope that no one will pursue her to reveal her identity. Granted that she has read Conrad's account of their meeting, unless she is incredibly thick-skinned she has already suffered enough for her sins. Let her rest in anonymity and peace, if any peace remains to her in this life. I for one feel certain that she will never again pay a visit, unannounced, to anybody.

She too came on a summer day, and there are other circumstances connected with the visit which make Conrad's experience strikingly like that of Coleridge. Both men were engaged upon creations of pure fancy, in which the original idea had come to them through reading. Coleridge found his in 'Purchas's Pilgrimage,' and I remember reading somewhere that Conrad found his in a newspaper item. But there was this im-

portant difference in the details: Coleridge, as he says, had been given in a dream the complete form and substance of 'Kubla Khan,' and the precise language with which to clothe the images which rose up before him in his vision. Conrad, on the other hand, had labored in a bloody sweat of the spirit for his own creation, 'Nostromo.'

> For twenty months [he says] neglecting the common joys of life which fall to the lot of the humblest on this earth, I had, like the prophet of old, 'wrestled with the Lord' for my creation, for the headlands of the coast, for the darkness of the Placid Gulf, the light on the snows, the clouds in the sky, and for the breath of life that had to be blown into the shapes of men and women, of Latin and Saxon, of Jew and Gentile. These are, perhaps, strong words, but it is difficult to characterize otherwise the intimacy and the strain of a creative effort in which mind and will and conscience are engaged to the full, hour after hour, day after day, away from the world, and to the exclusion of all that makes life really lovable and gentle — something for which a material parallel can only be found in the everlasting somber stress of the westward winter passage round Cape Horn.

He was writing the very last chapters of 'Nostromo'; Cape Horn was all but weathered, and just at the moment when he needed every ounce of his energy, all of his courage for the struggle against the impending and inevitable sense of defeat, all of his resources, physical and spiritual,

all his gathered-up capacity for concentration upon the final problems of his task — the general's daughter appeared. To be sure, that is the moment when she would appear. Porlock Persons have a genius for timing their visits thus.

And so the general's daughter came to me — or I should say, one of the general's daughters. There were three of these bachelor ladies, of nicely graduated ages, who held a neighboring farmhouse in a united and more or less military occupation. The eldest warred against the decay of manners in the village children, and executed frontal attacks upon the village mothers for the conquest of courtesies. The second skirmished and scouted all over the country; and it was this one who pushed a reconnaissance right up to my very table — I mean the one who wore the stand-up collars. She was really calling upon my wife in the soft spirit of afternoon friendliness, but with her usual martial determination she marched into my room swinging her stick — but no, I mustn't exaggerate. It is not my specialty. I am not a humoristic writer. In all soberness, then, all I am certain of is that she had a stick to swing.

A question now arises which one asks with reluctance: Where was Mrs. Conrad? She too failed her husband at the critical moment, just as Mrs. Coleridge had failed hers. Neither artist gives the slightest indication that he thought his wife to blame. Indeed, Conrad says, in speaking of his labors during those twenty months:

I suppose I went to bed sometimes, and got up the same number of times. Yes, I suppose I slept and ate the food put before me, and talked connectedly to my household on suitable occasions. But I had never been aware of the even flow of daily life, made easy and noiseless for me by a silent, watchful, tireless affection.

There could have been no question of the tirelessness of the affection. But the watchfulness? Women will take issue with me here. 'What!' they will say, 'do you expect a woman with small children to care for and the household tasks to supervise, to keep constant guard over her husband, day and night, for twenty months?' No, one does not expect that, but it would be a fine thing if one could, confidently, expect it. Where is the good of watchfulness at all if it is to be relaxed even for a moment? For it may be the critical moment as it was in Coleridge's case; and had Conrad not been so near to the end of his task, the result might have been equally fatal in his case.

Conrad's house was not protected in any way from possible intruders. No ditch or wall surrounded it; the doors and windows of his study stood open to 'that best friend of my work, the warm still sunshine of the wide fields,' and through one or the other of them came the general's daughter. She said, 'How do you do?'

I had heard nothing — no rustle, no footsteps. I had felt only a moment before a sort of premonition of evil; I had a sense of an inauspicious presence — just that much warning and no more; and then came the sound of the voice and the jar as of a terrible fall from a great height . . . I picked myself up quickly, of course; in other words, I jumped up from my chair, stunned and dazed, every nerve quivering with the pain of being uprooted out of one world and flung down into another — perfectly civil.

'Oh! How do you do? Won't you sit down?' . . .

Observe! I didn't howl at her, or start upsetting furniture, or throw myself on the floor and kick, or allow myself to hint in any other way at the appalling magnitude of the disaster. The whole world of Costaguana (the country of my seaboard tale), men, women, headlands, houses, mountains, town, *campo* (there was not a single brick, stone, or grain of sand I had not placed in position with my own hands); all the history, geography, politics, finance . . . all that had come crashing down about my ears. I felt that I could never pick up the pieces, and in that very moment I was saying, 'Won't you sit down?'

He doesn't take credit to himself for his restraint, but attributes it to his quarter-deck training in the British merchant marine. Well, the bachelor lady sat down, and, after looking about her 'with a slightly amused serenity,' she made precisely the remark which all Porlock Persons make:

'I'm afraid I interrupted you?'

They ask this question, not from any sense of delicacy, but merely I believe, to reassure themselves, from the manner of their unfortunate victims, that they have arrived as inopportunely as they had hoped.

Conrad said, 'Not at all.'

Then she said, 'And you sit like this, here, writing your — your ——'

Conrad admitted that he did. She thought this must be 'perfectly delightful'; but, before she had time to think anything else, succor came.

The general's daughter had a dog which had remained outside. We can easily imagine what kind of dog a Porlock Person would have, and we can imagine what it would be doing as it ran briskly here and there, nosing into every hole and corner in the garden. Conrad, too, had a dog, or rather his little son had one, a gift from Stephen Crane, a warm friend of the family. A dog chosen by Stephen Crane as a gift to the son of his fellow craftsman would be the implacable enemy, of course, of a Porlock Person's dog, and this one was no exception. He espied the general's daughter's dog from afar, and went for him, 'straight and swift, like a cannon-ball.' Conrad, the soul of courtesy, went at once to the rescue of the general's daughter's dog. 'Afterward,' he says,

'the lady went off, leaving me appalled before the death and devastation she had lightly made, and with the awfully instructive sound of the word "delightful" lingering in my ears.'

But before concluding this paper in which I have spoken harshly, and perhaps unjustly, of Porlock Persons, I have a confession to make: Once I came very nearly being a Porlock Person, and the artist I purposed visiting was none other than Conrad himself. Cold shivers go up and down my spine every time I think of the narrowness of his escape, and my own. I couldn't have been the general's daughter, for that visit must have occurred in 1902, or 1903, and it was much later that I made my unheralded approach. Leaving the Porlock of my native heath, in Iowa, I crossed three thousand miles of ocean, purchased a second-hand bicycle in London, and shortly thereafter was bowling along a road in Kent, in the direction of Conrad's dwelling. But in justice to myself I will say this: I had not been moved all that distance by idle curiosity. To me Conrad was, and still is, the greatest artist of his time. I revered and all but worshiped him, and I longed to see the man who had so stimulated my mind, who had stirred my emotions so deeply, and to whom I owed innumerable hours of the purest

kind of pleasure. I wanted to see him only for a moment, and I hoped to find a few words in which to express to him my profoundly felt gratitude.

Well, I cycled on, and despite the exercise and the fact that it was a warm July day, my feet grew colder and colder. At length when I was only a short distance from his house, panic seized me; I turned and cycled in the opposite direction as hard as I could go; and I didn't stop till both he and I were well out of danger.

I suppose there are Porlock Person potentialities in all of us. We are not to blame for this, but we *are* to blame if we allow them to become active qualities of our nature. Whenever we are tempted to call upon an artist — whether musician, poet, novelist, painter, sculptor — let us set out in the opposite direction instead. But if we feel that we really *must* see him, let us first send him a letter of warning, using Lamb's letter to Coleridge as a model. Let us even improve upon the model, and write, 'A few months hence may suit you better; a few years hence, better still. If so, say so.' Then, we may be sure, we shall have no unfinished 'Kubla Khans' on our consciences, and we shall never be held up to ridicule as the general's daughter was.

XII

SETTLING DOWN IN POLYNESIA

SOME time ago, my friend C. B. and I, after various wanderings here and there about the world, decided that it was time we were settling down. We had often discussed this project, but hitherto a love of changing scenes and new faces had prevented our making a choice of any one spot in which to live. I was the more reluctant, for there were many horizons yet to be crossed, many lands which we had visited only in the imagination. How was it possible, I contended, life being so short, to rest content with the same circle of hills, the same outlook, however pleasant, over land or sea? But at last C. B. took a firm stand.

'You may do as you like,' he said, 'but I shall wait no longer. Every month finds us less inclined to come to a decision in this matter. No, unless we forego this roving life now, we shall always be homeless wanderers, and we shall spend our last days, very likely, in some dingy *pension* in Paris, or in one of those old men's homes where they take you and your little savings on spec, hoping you will die before it is all spent on your maintenance.'

'Well,' I replied, 'growing old in Paris wouldn't be such a misfortune even though we did have to live in a boarding-house. Or if it should happen to be America, I know of several old men's homes where we might be very comfortable.' But I had put him off with arguments of this sort before, and at last he convinced me that he had the right of it. Therefore we began a discussion of plans. We had long ago fixed upon that part of the world where we would live when the time came for settling down. We are both lovers of islands, and those of eastern Polynesia attracted us more than any of the others we had seen. The climate was healthy; there were no tropical fevers of any sort; the fishing was good; we could swim at all seasons of the year — in short, if there was one place where we might hope to be happy without further wanderings, we believed it was to be found on some island in the eastern Pacific. So we got our belongings together, not forgetting our books, and set out for what we then believed was to be a last period of wandering.

Several months were spent in voyaging, as opportunity offered, among both atolls and high islands, and at length we came to one of the latter which seemed to us the most beautiful of them all, and the most desirable as a place to live from every

practicable point of view. It is fairly large, as islands go in that part of the world: twenty miles across in the widest part, and some one hundred and fifty around the coast. All the inhabitants live on the low land bordering the sea. The interior is a wilderness abandoned to wild cattle, goats, and pigs — a region of deep valleys, high, fern-covered plateaus, and steep, unscalable, cloud-capped mountains. No trails cross it, but there is a road around the coastal land. The island is drained by no less than eighty streams, and surrounded by a barrier reef which lies from a few hundred yards to a mile or two off-shore, so that wherever you go along the road, you have the music of running water mingled with the everlasting booming of the surf on the reef.

We lived for several weeks in a town on the western side of the island — as pretty a place as one could hope to see, with a harbor filled with shipping, all sail, which is used in the inter-island trade in fruit, fish, copra, and pearl-shell. The streets are broad, well shaded and well kept, the villas attractive, and the gardens and lawns surrounding them filled with such a variety of flowers and flowering-shrubs, and trees, that one could look at them for hours, always finding something new of interest. One evening, after dinner at a

little hotel on the water-front, we were walking along a road on the outskirts of the town, when we passed a large villa and were hailed, in English, by a man who was taking his ease on the veranda. He asked us to come in, which we did, and passed a very pleasant evening with him. He had heard, he said, of our purpose in coming to the island, how we hoped to settle there, and he thought it his duty to give us some advice. He urged very strongly that we reconsider the matter.

'Let me tell you what my own experience has been,' he said. 'I came to this place forty years ago, and at first I thought I could never be thankful enough for the chance which had brought me. I am sure that I was, and am still, as much a lover of islands as either of you. There is scarcely a fragment of land in all this part of the Pacific that I have not explored from one end to the other. I had a little money — not a great deal, but a small sum went farther in those days than it does now, and I invested it carefully, here and elsewhere, but chiefly among the Low Islands. I now own two atolls of that group, both of them well planted to coconuts ——'

I interrupted him here. 'You own two islands?' I said. 'Would you, by any chance, consider selling one of them?'

'Willingly,' he replied. 'I will sell to-morrow, to-night, this minute. If you are in the market for an island you have come to the right shop.'

It amuses me, now, to think how far short we were of having enough capital to buy an island with eighty thousand bearing coconut trees on it. His price was forty thousand dollars, and between us C. B. and I had two — two thousand.

'Well,' said our host, 'I'm afraid I can't sell this evening. But to return to what I was saying a moment ago, I have long since realized that I made a mistake in coming here. I have done well enough. I live pleasantly and comfortably, but I have entirely dropped out of the lives of my old friends at home, and I've largely lost contact with what is taking place in the outside world. I thought I could keep in touch by means of newspapers, books, reviews, but believe me, they offer a very poor substitute for personal contacts. The years have slipped by, and now I am well into my sixties. When I look back over my life, what have I to remember? You may be surprised when I tell you that it is largely only such evenings as this — pleasant chats with strangers from outside, who bring with them, whether they realize it or not, a breath of cold, invigorating air from the higher latitudes. I mean no disparagement to you or the

others when I say that a man's memories of forty years should have higher lights than these.'

Then he told us, at length, of the disadvantages of living in exile, even in so delightful a spot: of the monotony of the life, the loneliness, the lack of stimulating associations. But we had considered all of these, we said, and were willing to make the sacrifices, knowing that we could not have the islands and the other things at the same time. It was late when we left his house. He walked with us down to his gate, and before we parted, he said,

'What a pity it is that one man's experience can never be of the slightest use to other men! I am sure you are making a great mistake — one you will both live to regret, and yet I'm powerless to prevent it. Well, good-night. If I can be of service at any time, you have only to let me know.'

We thanked him and walked in silence through the deserted, moonlit streets to our lodgings.

The following morning we set out on foot to the eastward, having decided to make a complete circuit of the island in the search for a future home-site. The road curved this way and that, sometimes going inland for a mile or two, but for the most part skirting the lagoon beach. During the first three hours of the journey we passed many orderly plantations and Chinese truck-

gardens hanging to the steep slopes of the hills, and strips of rice swamp at the mouths of sunny valleys, but at last the well-beaten road gave place to a grass-grown cart-track, and the houses of European and Chinese construction to the little thatched dwellings of the native population.

Toward the middle of the afternoon we came to a stream broader and deeper than any we had yet crossed, flowing out of primeval forest. A foot-path led inland along the bank, and being hot from our walk we decided to follow it until we came to a good swimming place. Limes, wild oranges, and bananas were growing along the banks shaded by lofty trees that mingled their branches over the stream, and the green filtered light was as though the silence of the deep valley and the humid, motionless air had been stained and dyed by the aura of innumerable growing things. We had been walking for a quarter of an hour when we came to a deep, still pool, about thirty yards long by half as wide. At the farther end of it a score of naked brown children were running to take concealment in the bush. We were sorry to drive them from their bath, but knowing they would come back, we stripped to our swimming-trunks and dove into the cool water.

It was a delightful place for a mid-afternoon plunge — clear, deep water, a sandy bottom, and far overhead the green vault made by the overhanging trees. While standing in shoal water near the bank, we saw a chubby four-year-old baby crouched behind a screen of fern, hoping to escape notice as she watched the clumsy antics of the white men. The alarm had caught her on the opposite side of the river from where she had left her frock and her hat of split bamboo, and she hadn't the courage to cross and get them. C. B. walked toward her, holding out his hands. She was so young that she had not yet lost the confidence of babyhood, and after hesitating for a moment she came forward and was soon shouting with pleasure as he took her for a ride on his back across the pool. Then, by twos and threes, the others appeared and stood along the bank while they made up their minds that we were harmless. Presently a boy leaped into the water with a yell, and the others quickly followed. The baby let go C. B.'s shoulders and struck out alone to join in the play, while we climbed the bank, dressed, and sat down to watch them.

After a few moments they took no further notice of us. They were playing a game as old as the human race and older, for monkeys may be

seen at it, without the water feature, in many a tropical jungle. An old tree, close to the bank, sent out a long, drooping limb which curved gradually to within a yard or so of the stream. Four or five children took their places at the lower end of the branch, and others, stationed above, began to jump rhythmically so that the limb swayed with increasing violence. As it sprang up and down, those below needed all their strength to hold on, and finally one or more would let go and disappear with great splashings in the pool. Then they took their places in the line above, trying to dislodge the others.

It was a charming scene: the great tree crowded with children whose brown bodies appeared and disappeared among the foliage, the broad pool mottled with light and shade and dotted with heads and vanishing legs and arms, with half a dozen fat babies playing in the sunny shallows — it was one of those simple, beautiful pictures which linger in the memory. We were reluctant to leave, and it was almost dark when we came out again on the road.

We walked on until it was quite dark and the tracks of the stars were shining across the lagoon; and there being no settlement within view we decided to spend the night in the open. After a

supper of biscuit and chocolate and bananas, when we had stretched out with our haversacks under our heads, I told C. B. of a question which had come into mind that afternoon. Was the native up-bringing, freed from all schooling and restraint, possible only for these brown children of the islands, bred in surroundings where almost no struggle is needed to survive? Would a white child, reared under the same conditions, develop the same easy-going temperament, or would the restless and aggressive spirit of our race triumph over environment? How many of the qualities which make us the world's masters for the time being, are inherent in the spark of life handed down from one generation to another? How many are merely the result of being reared in an environment of increasing materialism, competition for food, mechanical achievement, and the like?

'That recalls an experiment I used to dream of making,' he said. 'My idea was to seek out an uninhabited island in this part of the world, a small, fertile place where living would be easy. I would need a dozen children for my experiment — baby boys and girls young enough to know no word of speech. I would want white children, brown children, and Chinese — young civilization, no civilization, and the oldest civilization of them all. I

would put up a comfortable shelter for them, stocked with what is necessary, and a place for myself at the other end of the island. In the beginning my children would need a certain amount of attention, of course, and as they grew up I would teach them the rudiments of fishing, and how to gather yams, breadfruit, plantains, and the like. Beyond that I would teach them nothing, and in all my intercourse with them I would be careful never to use my voice. You see what I am driving at — to let them bring themselves up in a state of nature, without handicaps other than those of race and birth.'

'Did you ever seriously think of making this experiment?' I asked.

'I said I used to dream of it. But what an enormously interesting one it would be! What, for example, might one expect my isolated children to develop in the way of speech? And in a primitive environment, with conditions equal for all of them, which race would excel?'

'The Chinese,' said a voice, so close at hand that we both jumped up and looked around. Leaning against a tree behind us stood a white man — we made him out to be white a moment later when he invited us to his house.

'I'm sorry,' he said; 'I didn't mean to eaves-

drop, but you took it into your heads to camp right at my doorstep, so I couldn't avoid hearing what you were saying. I was dozing here in my chair when you came, and your voices wakened me.'

It was then our turn to make apologies. His house was so well screened by shrubbery that we had lain down within half a dozen yards without having seen it.

'I was much interested,' he went on, 'in what you were just discussing, but it would interest me still more' — turning to C. B. — 'to drop in on you during the early days of your experiment while you were playing nursemaid to a dozen American, Polynesian, and Chinese babies. As I said, I think the Chinese would come out on top, but don't let me get started on Chinese Civilization. I'm an enthusiast on that subject, and enthusiasts are always bores. Come out on the veranda — it's cooler there, and we'll talk of something else.'

We could see, even by starlight, what a delightful spot he had chosen for a dwelling-place. He himself had built the house. It stood on piles at the edge of the lagoon, and the veranda, shaded by overhanging trees, extended over the water with steps leading down to a small boat-landing. The view was across a wide bay to the wooded

hills beyond, and on the land side, from the door which gave on the road, you looked up a valley toward the mountains of the interior. Our host lit a lamp and set it on a table adzed out by hand from a slab of native rosewood. There we saw journals of learned societies side by side with reviews in English, German, and French, and shelves stocked with alluring rows of books. The walls were hung with curious ornaments: pieces of Chinese embroidery, Malay knives and sarongs, necklaces and brass-wire anklets from Portuguese East Africa, and Bolivian capes of dyed Vicuña wool — the fruit of wanderings in strange lands.

While we were talking of the islands and their people, I asked our host what had brought him here in the first place. This was a subject endlessly interesting to us, in connection with the white men we met in Polynesia. Some of them had curious tales to tell of the reasons for their coming, and this Englishman's struck me as being the most curious of any we had heard thus far. He had been living in China, and one evening, in Hongkong, he met a traveler who had just come from this island.

'That was the first time I had heard of the place,' he said. 'This man told me something of the native language, how beautiful it is, and how

rich in many respects. I asked him for specimens of it, and among others he gave me the following. They may seem sheer gibberish to you, but they haunted me like the thought of buried treasure:

Aaoaraa-moa: the hour of the crowing of the cock.
Hui hui mania: a great calm without wind.
Ahiahirumaruma: cloudy evening.
Moana faréré: the unfathomable sea.

You will admit, I think, the beauty of the meanings, but you may think I'm a little mad when I tell you that these words, and some others like them, decided me to leave China for Polynesia. I wanted to know all there is to be known of this language, and to make the story short, I've been studying it on the spot ever since. I can't tell you what an absorbing task it has been! For it *is* treasure of the richest sort, buried treasure, too, a great deal of it. In these days the natives are forgetting the stately speech of their forefathers, coining all sorts of hybrid words out of English and French, and Chinese, which have nothing to commend them but the fact that they're useful.'

Then, opening his notebooks, the result of twelve years of research, he brought us under the spell of his own enthusiasm for this Polynesian dialect. Many of the words were like little poems, telling of the peace of starlit nights, of grateful

noonday shade, of the sea in all its moods, of the shadows of clouds on grassy uplands. But vastly more interesting to me than the bright, colored words, was the man, who for twelve solitary years had been so happily playing with them, like a child with shells on a deserted beach. He must have been fifty or thereabouts, an age when most men, without the ties of family, feel loneliness creeping upon them; but he seemed not to feel it, and happily unconscious of the need of interests other than those he had in the islands, their people, and their strange and beautiful speech. And it was so unselfish and glowing an interest that one could not doubt its genuineness or its absorption for him. Nevertheless, remembering the other Englishman we had met a few days earlier, C. B. was moved to ask whether he thought the islands suitable places for white men to live in.

'Suitable!' he said. 'I should think they are! But wait — I must qualify that, of course. Most men have gifts which could find no outlet here, and to me the greatest unfaithfulness is unfaithfulness to one's self. In each of us there is, perhaps, the gleam of an ability, a power, a gift, to do something a little better than some one else has done or could do it; or it may be only the faculty for feeling some emotion a little more keenly than

another may feel it. I have found among these islands the best uses for my own small talents, and it seems to me that I haven't the right to consider them as nothing. As for you, for another, who can say? There is an old island saying: *O te puoé te muhu na to taata anaé'iho o te ité i te faaroo*, which means, "The sea-shell murmurs for him alone who knows how to listen." If you know or can learn, how to listen, I think you might be very happy here. If you can't — well, the world is wide ——'

He lit his pipe, and smoked in silence for a moment. Then he said, 'By Jove! I'd almost forgotten! Are either of you sleepy? Because if you're not, you must come with me to the next village. It's only a mile down the road, and they are having an all-night *himiné* there — a sort of a song service, you know. An old chap in the village, named Pohu, has passed the word around that he's going to die at midnight; so all of his friends and relatives are to be on hand to sing him to glory. I think you might be interested.'

We said that we should be greatly interested. 'But how does he know that he is going to die tonight?' I asked. 'It seems to me that he is rather confident about the hour.'

'He is,' our host replied — 'too confident, to my way of thinking. If it was any one but Pohu I

wouldn't say so, for it is really surprising how often some of these people forecast the time of their death. They seem to have a presentiment, a "hunch" — whatever you like to call it. But Pohu — I'm not so sure of him. He predicted his death about a year ago, and all of his friends gathered to feast and sing at his passing. But he failed to keep his promise. It was very odd. No one would have anything to do with him for days afterward. If he doesn't die this time he will have lost caste completely.'

The village being in the direction of our journey, C. B. and I took our haversacks with us, intending to start from there the following morning. It was about ten o'clock when we left the Englishman's house — a very calm night, so that we heard the singing from a long distance. We were continually pulling ahead of our host in our eagerness to arrive. Here was something new in our experience. Never before had we seen a man presiding at his own funeral, listening to the music, and then obligingly dying as the pall-bearers came to carry him away.

In nearly all Polynesian villages there is what is called a *himiné* house where public gatherings are held — a sort of town-hall used for many community purposes. In this village it was a long

building with a thatched roof and walls of plaited bamboo. It was lighted with kerosene lamps, and near the building, under a grove of mango trees, were several tables loaded with food, and with lamps set here and there along them. When we arrived, people were passing back and forth from the *himiné* house to the refreshment tables, taking what they liked to eat and then returning to sing.

The house was well filled; the men, women, and children sitting on the floor in rows, facing one end of the room. At that end, on a small raised platform, sat the dying man, in an old-fashioned red-plush rocking-chair, with a pillow under his huge bare feet, and another behind his head. He was dressed in a coat of white drill and a waist-cloth reaching to his knees. Children were sent to a neighboring house for chairs for us, and as there was only one place to put them, close to the platform, we sat half-facing the prospective deceased and half-facing the mourners.

Some of the children who had been swimming with us in the river that afternoon were present with their parents. Among them was the little girl whom C. B. had given a ride on his back. She came up very shyly and gave him a flower, and ran back to her mother. Then another little girl gave me one, whereupon the audience broke out

into half-suppressed laughter. It didn't seem much like a funeral. I was glad of a legitimate opportunity to smile, for I had been looking at Pohu who rolled his eyes about in such a mournful way, and seemed so fully aware of his responsibilities as a prospective corpse, that it was difficult to remain grave. He was enjoying himself, there wasn't a doubt of it. He reminded me of the type of men to be found everywhere, among primitive as well as civilized people, who will take any chance, however desperate or absurd, suffer any humiliation, if only they may be lifted for a moment into the public gaze.

But supposing he was to die as he had promised? This thought must have been in every one's mind, and as the evening wore on the interest became more tense, the singing more earnest. Deep silence followed the intervals between the songs, and after eleven o'clock there were no more excursions to the refreshment tables. I would have given a good deal to have known what they were all thinking. Evidently they were anxious, but whether for fear he would die or fear that he would not it was impossible to know.

Pohu lay back in his chair, his eyes closed, his large hands folded. He was a huge man, with fat jowls and a big stomach. He could not see the

clock, but he must have heard it ticking during the silences. It was one of those cheap American clocks with the word 'Regulator' printed on the glass door. All at once, during a hush following a song, Pohu's lips moved, and his thin, squeaky voice filled the room: 'Eaha te hora?' — what time is it? — he asked. Some one told him that it was a quarter to twelve. He didn't open his eyes, but I could see his chest rising and falling, and every little while he raised a fat forefinger and let it drop listlessly again. I watched that finger, fascinated, as the minute-hand crept on to join the hour-hand. It seemed an index of his failing vitality. At last it remained motionless. Pohu was no longer breathing, it seemed to me, and after an interval of deep silence on the part of the mourners, one of them — his sister — rose and walked to his side, looking down at him intently. Then she sank to the floor, with her head in her arms, and began rocking back and forth, moaning in the most heart-rending way. Her other sister and Pohu's wife took up the lament, and yet other women. In the midst of it a song was started, and every one who was not keening, joined in. The building rocked with that weird chorus which must have been heard by Charon himself, awaiting the on-coming soul at his dark

ferry on the Styx. But *was* it an on-coming soul? The Englishman thought so, for he gripped my arm, and in order to make himself heard, almost shouted in my ear, 'I believe he's done it this time!' C. B. was sitting on the very edge of his chair, gripping the sides of it as though he were afraid of falling off. I looked at the clock. It was seven minutes past twelve. And so ended our first day as prospective homesteaders in the South Seas.

But it was not the end of Pohu. He came to life again, shortly after the time he had set for dying. The mourners were in the midst of the triumphant death-song when he opened his eyes, sat up in his chair, and looked around with a sheepish smile. The singing and keening stopped immediately, of course, and Pohu, after a moment of hesitation, had to acknowledge that he was again mistaken about the hour of his demise.

C. B., the Englishman, and I were the only ones who found either relief or amusement in this anti-climax. The others were seriously angry, and listening to their denunciations of Pohu, I realized what primitive folk the Polynesians still are for all their century and a half of contact with western civilization. His relatives gathered around him, giving him a tongue-lashing that he

will remember, very likely, until the time comes for him to die in earnest. One of his sisters, a woman of thirty, gave him a slap on the face that nearly bowled him out of his chair. Then the audience left him there, alone, and in no doubt that he had sailed far into the north of village opinion. We learned afterward that he was ostracized for weeks, beside losing his position as elder in the village church.

As for C. B. and I, 'settling down' became a permanent occupation with us, and I can't imagine a pleasanter one for men of itinerant habits. We made the circuit of this island, and later, of many others, in the search for an ideal home-site. We found one every quarter of an hour. There were so many that it was impossible to make a choice. Therefore, we wandered on, and in the midst of a multitude of small, delightful adventures by the way, we didn't much care whether we ever made it or not.

XIII

TAHITI'S COCONUT-RADIO SERVICE

Not many devotees of the radio, however well informed they may be, know, I imagine, that the inhabitants of the island of Tahiti have had, for centuries, a remarkable wireless service known as The Coconut Radio. There is not a village on the island which does not have both receiving and sending stations, and so efficient is the service that the events of one village are often known in some other village thirty or forty miles away, before they have actually taken place.

This promptness in island news-spreading is due to the fact that all stations on the coconut-radio circuit are in charge of a group of extraordinary old native ladies who serve without a thought of reward, purely for love of the work itself. They have plenty of time to give to it, for most of them have long since raised their families, so that their household duties — never irksome even at their heaviest in the South Seas — have been reduced to next to nothing. To see one of them sitting of an afternoon in the doorway of her little thatched hut, you would never sus-

pect the importance of the part she plays in island life. Her eyes are half closed, her hands folded in her lap, and her face, in repose, usually wears an expression of settled melancholy, as though, like Mrs. Gummidge, she were always thinking of 'the old 'un.' She seems neither to see nor to hear anything that is taking place in her immediate vicinity, to say nothing of in the village at large, but this is mere seeming. Nothing escapes her, and you yourself will not escape if you chance to be passing her dwelling. She has seen you from a distance, and as you approach she raises her head and hails you with a shrill '*Ia ora na!*' (Health to you!)

Now you are caught, and you may as well stop and deliver.

'*Eiha te parau api?*' (What's the news?) she asks eagerly, and her little black eyes bore into you like gimlets. On an island so remote from the world as Tahiti, everything that happens is news, even though it is nothing more than a chicken crossing the road, so it is useless to say that you have no news. She knows better, and if you should go on without unburdening yourself, she will invent something after you have gone, and broadcast it to all stations on her side of the island, giving your name for authority.

Such an old woman is known in the island tongue as a *Vahiné faatia parau-api* (a news-spreader), and a particularly gifted one is called a *Vahiné faatia parau-api-rahi* (a powerful news-spreader). It seems to me that they are all of this latter sort — at any rate, all those were with whom I have had experience. It is amazing how, without budging from their door-steps, they manage to disseminate immediately, to long distances, the news they have heard, or thought they have heard, or wished they had heard.

I remember once riding on a bicycle through a country district about thirty miles from the town of Papeete. I was passing a little thatched hut known as one of the most powerful sending-stations on the coconut-radio circuit, when I heard an excited hail: '*Haere mai ta maa!*' (Come and eat!) Now this is sometimes a mere perfunctory greeting, but sometimes it is a genuine invitation, especially when given around meal-time. I have noticed, however, that the old lady wireless operators never mean it to be taken as an invitation. One rarely sees them at a meal of any sort, and I believe that they live almost entirely on gossip.

I stopped and replied, in the expected manner, that I was not hungry.

'Where are you going?' she then asked. I told her that I was on my way to the district of Tautira, to visit a friend, whom I named. When she had wormed out of me every little detail about my proposed visit: how long I expected to stay, what I meant to do afterward, what I had in the parcel fastened on the back of my bicycle, etc., she gave me the news of all the villages within fifteen miles. Then she was silent for a moment. I was trying to think of some excuse for getting away, when she said, 'Don't you think it's about time you were getting married?'

'Married!' I said. 'Why?'

'Every man ought to get married some day,' she replied, 'and if you don't soon, very likely you never will. Now there's Nuna-Vahiné in Tautira — she has two fine daughters, and either of them would make you a good wife. They are neat and tidy, and both of them speak a little English. The older one is a wonderful cook, too, and she would soon learn to cook American fashion. You'd better go and see Nuna while you are in Tautira.'

I thanked her for the advice and went on my way. I had fifteen miles farther to go, and rode along in leisurely fashion, enjoying to the full the drowsy silence of the afternoon. There was not a

breath of wind, and the lagoon reflected perfectly the shapes of every cloud, the overhanging palms, and the forms of sea-birds skimming over the still water. No one but myself was abroad at that hour. I could almost swear that no one passed me on the road, but when I reached my friend's house at Tautira — although I had not informed him of my coming, he was expecting me, the table was laid for two, and supper was all ready.

'How did you know I was coming?' I asked.

'By coconut radio, of course,' he said. 'The message came through nearly an hour ago. But what's this I hear about your going to marry one of Nuna-Vahiné's daughters?'

Then he gave me all the details. Not only was I going to marry one of Nuna's daughters, but I had already asked for the older one. The proposal had been accepted, and the purpose of this present visit was to complete the arrangements.

My knowledge of Tahitian is scant, and I had some difficulty in explaining matters to Nuna-Vahiné and her chosen daughter. On this occasion I was not able to decide whether they regarded with favor or disfavor, the efficacy of the coconut-radio service.

Another remarkable instance of the speed with which it works happened several years ago. A

coconut radio, of course, can't operate where there are no coconut trees, and so its activities are confined to the island itself. News from the outside world comes through an ordinary wireless station at Point Venus, where the lighthouse is, and where Captain Cook, in 1769, observed the transit of Venus across the sun's disc at the time when he named this group of mountain peaks thrust up from the sea, 'The Society Islands.'

One day a message came through the Point Venus station to the effect that there had been an earthquake on the coast of Chile, some four thousand miles distant, and that the inhabitants of the islands in the eastern Pacific might expect a small tidal wave as the result of this submarine disturbance.

This bit of slightly disquieting news lost nothing in its transmission from station to station on the coconut-radio circuit. At Faaa, a district just beyond the town of Papeete, the tidal wave was reported to be thirty feet high, and advancing across the Pacific at a speed of one hundred miles per hour. Shortly afterward when the news had reached Taravao — a settlement some thirty-five miles farther on — the tidal wave was said to be sixty feet high and traveling at five hundred miles per hour.

The old lady operators stuck to their posts until they had received, embellished, and passed on the news. Then, seizing their coconut-shell baskets of smoking materials, they tucked up the skirts of their mother-hubbards and ran to the mountains, and you wouldn't have believed that such old women could have shown such speed and agility. They scrambled through all but impenetrable thickets, and shinned up all but unscalable cliffs. They were over the hills and far away almost as soon as their own messages; and they were not alone in this retreat. Most of the inhabitants followed them: fathers carrying pigs, chickens, taro, tinned beef, and the like; mothers carrying babies, dish-pans and bundles of clothing, children with bedding-rolls, mats, baskets of oranges, bananas and mangoes; Chinese store-keepers bent double under enormous burdens — away they all went, and most of them kept going until they had reached the summits of the highest hills. Within an hour after the report had first reached the island, the lowlands were as empty of life as a seaside resort in the winter time. In the village where I was then living I met but one other resident, an American who had come to Tahiti to escape the effects of prohibition at home. He was moving unsteadily along the deserted street, a

bottle in either hand, and his glazed eyes fixed upon some indefinite point in space.

'Hello!' I said; 'aren't you afraid of being drowned?'

He paused and leaned over backward in order to get me in truer perspective.

'Drowned?' he said. 'Naw! I ain't afraid o' nothin'! Let 'er come! Wha's differnce? But say! I wish thish ti'al wave was whiskey. Tha'd be a good way to die, huh?'

He cackled asthmatically and nearly fell over in his merriment. Then he waved a bottle at me.

'You tell 'em I said let 'er come! I'm orready, jus' soon's I finish thish licker.'

'She' didn't come, however — at least she didn't come to Tahiti, and during the following week the inhabitants trickled back to the lowlands. Within a few days all the old ladies were again at their stations, and working harder than ever to make up for lost time. They were bursting with news of what had happened — so they said — during the sojourn in the mountains. Some of the malicious ones spread abroad the most scandalous reports of goings-on up there, which caused more mischief than a tidal wave could have effected, no matter how high it might have been.

There is a certain amount of scandalous news-spreading by coconut radio, and I sometimes think this has its good results. Consider for a moment the matter of family skeletons. With us, in America, and the same is true in European countries, these skeletons are hidden in the darkest and most secret of family closets, and people, their lives long, are tortured by the apprehension that some outsider may catch a glimpse of them. At Tahiti, on the other hand, every one knows every one else, and thanks to the coconut radio, everything about every one else. Family skeletons are made to frisk and caper like jumping-jacks, in the clear light of day, and the result is that most of them are seen to be mirth-provoking rather than shocking. I think it would be a good plan if all family skeletons were to be thus exhibited. It might be a little humiliating at first, to some of the families concerned, but what a relief the realization would be to them afterward, that there was now nothing more to conceal, and to have the closets aired and lightened with windows, and used for more healthy purposes.

It is pleasant to live in a place where the inhabitants laugh, not only at, but with each other. One finds glum individuals here and there, but as a race they have been blessed with generous gifts

of gayety and light-heartedness. Do you remember William Blake's 'Laughing Song'?

> When the green woods laugh with the voice of joy
> And the dimpled stream goes laughing by;
> When the air does laugh with our merry wit,
> And the green hill laughs with the noise of it;
>
> When the painted birds laugh in the shade
> Where our table with cherries and nuts is spread,
> Come live and be merry and join with me
> To sing the sweet chorus of 'Ha ha he!'

This song might almost be the Tahitian national anthem. The valleys ring with the chorus of 'Ha ha he,' and 'Ha ha ho,' and 'He he, ho ho, ha ha ha,' and in the younger folk this laughter gushes forth, pure and limpid as spring-water, upon the slightest provocation. One is often puzzled at hearing natives laughing immoderately about something which would give a white man cause for only a faint smile; but most of us northerners, with our impaired digestions, our regrets for yesterday and our anxieties for to-morrow, have long since forgotten how to laugh.

Of course, not even the younger sort of Tahitians laugh perpetually. If they did, I should leave by the next steamer, for endless mirth would be no more endurable than endless gloom. But in this easy-going island world, where no-

thing moves with speed except the news over the coconut radio, both the days and the nights seem unusually long; there is ample leisure for everything: for laughter, for occasional outbursts of passionate weeping, for family quarrels and for family reconciliations, for going to church and for going fishing. There is a time for sitting down — but here is a pleasant feature of island life: there is never any particular time set for getting up again.

During my sojourn here, I have seen the bottoms of more feet than I have seen in all my life before: slippered feet, bare feet; toes up, heels up; feet dangling over the ends of sofas and veranda railings, resting on the gunwales of canoes, perched on the backs of chairs; large feet, small feet, most of them brown and all of them in attitudes of repose. One hundred and twenty-nine years have passed since white men first seriously began to teach the islanders habits of regular, sustained, want-increasing and want-satisfying industry, but they have not profited greatly by the instruction. To be sure, one occasionally hears in their churches the old missionary hymn, 'Work for the Night is Coming,' but not even the coconut-radio operators could ferret out news of a man or woman of pure Polynesian blood who really believes in the doctrine.

For my own part, I am glad that this is so; and sometimes in America, when I am weary of rushing about, and of seeing others both working and playing with such frantic haste — hurrying in and out of shops, offices, trains, museums, hospitals, cemeteries, theaters, parks, churches, clubs, libraries, and the like, it has been refreshing to think of Tahiti, and to speculate as to what the natives were not doing at that particular hour. I do not mean to imply that they never work. On the contrary, when there is occasion for it they will toil as hard as any white man. But they have also practiced for centuries the art of being idle, and in knowledge of it they are far in advance of northern peoples.

A good deal of wisdom is to be found, I believe, at the bottom of such practice; for when all is said and done, what does a great deal of the world's feverish industry amount to? Stevenson, in his 'Apology for Idlers,' said of Sainte-Beuve, that 'as he grew older, he came to regard all experience as a single great book in which to study for a few years ere we go hence; and it seemed all one to him whether you should read in Chapter XX, which is the differential calculus, or in Chapter XXXIX, which is hearing the band play in the gardens.' There is an excellent foot-

note to Chapter XXXIX, which is sitting under a pandanus tree, watching the cloud shadows on the lagoon. Tahitians have it by heart, and to see them conning it over you might think them the laziest people in the world. You and I are such novices in the art of being idle that we regard sitting under a pandanus tree merely as sitting under a pandanus tree. For Tahitians it is much more than that, and their faculties, if they could be shown objectively, would be seen, polished and shining with the brightness of well-used tools.

Not that they spend their hours of leisure in resolving abstruse intellectual or moral problems. On the contrary they have little faculty for abstract thought. But their physical senses, particularly those of sight and hearing, are always in use, and they are amazingly keen. This explains in part, I suppose, some of the mysteries of the coconut radio.

Only the other day I made an excursion far up a valley with a group of native children, to gather oranges. We were in the midst of this pleasant occupation; the children were in the trees throwing down the fruit to me, when one of them shouted, '*Pereoo-uira!*' (Motor car!) and a little girl who was putting the oranges into baskets, said to me, 'You'd better go back to your house now.'

'Why?' I asked.

'Your friend Pupuré has come to see you.' 'Pupuré' is the common name for any light-complexioned man.

'How do you know he has come?'

'That was his car,' she replied. 'I know it by the sound of the engine.'

We were a long way from the road, well beyond the range, I would have thought, of hearing any car that might be passing. Certainly I had heard nothing. But the children had, and when I returned to my house, there was my friend awaiting me. He drives a Ford, and there are many of them on the island. The sound of the motor is like that of all other Fords, it seems to me, but this little girl had recognized it at once as belonging to my friend. She will make an excellent coconut-radio operator fifty years from now.

For age and the deep knowledge of humankind which is the fruit of years of experience, are necessary, of course, to a really successful operator. All the old ladies I have been speaking of have this knowledge. The innumerable hours of sitting under pandanus trees have not been wasted. They have been at their studies this long while, and as they have no books except the Bible, they spend their ample leisure in studying at first hand

and with deep interest, the great book of human nature. By the time they become self-appointed coconut-radio operators, not only do they know everything there is to be known about all the inhabitants of the island, but they are excellent psychologists as well, able to forecast how any individual will act under any imaginable conditions. To them, the back of a chance passer-by is full of meaning; and so sharp-witted are they that they note at once any deviation from the usual, in the carriage of the head, or the tone of the voice. They know at once what this means, and often it affords them matter for news which will keep all stations on their side of the island busy for an hour or more. Their chief defect, as I have implied, is their excitability. In receiving messages they are as impartial as the Fates: good news or bad news, it is all one to them; but they have nothing like the placidity of the three grim sisters. The moment they turn from receiving to broadcasting, they become very human; and if it is good news, they pass it on infinitely better, and if bad news, immeasurably worse than they received it.

I have often been surprised at the speed with which European or American songs are disseminated about the island. I am not sure that the

coconut radio is responsible for this, but I should think it more than likely. Some time ago I made a brief sojourn in America at the time when the popular song,

> Yes, sir, she's my baby!
> No, sir, I don't mean maybe!

had just been published. Upon returning to Tahiti, a few weeks later, I found 'Yes, Sir, She's my Baby,' there before me. It was being sung all round the island — not the English version, of course, but a Tahitian one. Girls played it on their accordions, boys on their mouth-organs; mothers sang it to their children, and fishermen sang it of an evening as they paddled in their canoes along the reef.

I suppose this is merely another piece of evidence which shows how small the world is becoming in these radio-active days. But as I have said, Tahiti has been coconut-radio-active for centuries. Whoever doubts this has only to come here for a brief visit. Within a quarter of an hour, the news of his arrival will be known to every one in the port and the adjacent villages. Within twenty minutes, the old lady operator at Tehaupoo, the farthest settlement of all from Papeete, will be saying to some crony of hers: 'I hear there's a new *Popaa-Marité* (American) just ar-

rived by the steamer. They say ——' and then she will give a minute description of the new arrival, a complete catalogue of his physical peculiarities and a great deal of his family history, and if he could be listening, he would learn a great many things about himself of which he was ignorant before.

XIV

PUBLIC BENCHES AND PUBLIC BENCHING

BEING, by profession and inclination, a looker-on at life, I have spent a great deal of time in places of public resort, such as hotels, parks, ferry boats, and the waiting-rooms of railway stations. The hours thus passed, added together, would make what a busy man would doubtless call an appalling, and a man of my own profession, a respectable, total. As a result of them I think I may lay claim to being, in a small way, an authority on the matter of public benches, and it is my belief that there are not nearly enough of them in America. There is no lack of indoor seating accommodation; I am speaking here only of outdoor benches, quite as essential to public convenience, and much more essential to the public health. The East and Far West are fairly well although by no means adequately supplied; of the South I am not qualified to speak: but visit the Middle West, and if in any town or city in the vast stretch of country extending from, but not including, Chicago to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, you find so many as one hundred

benches where a looker-on at life may pleasantly and variously engage in his calling, I would thank you for the name of the place. My own experience has been less fortunate. I have not, of course, visited every part of this territory, but if I may judge by many a footsore, fruitless quest, largely in the Mississippi Valley, then I may say that the majority of American municipalities have made most grudging provision for the comfort and convenience of the members of my useful profession.

'Useful?' you may say, regarding me with a faint, skeptical smile. 'Just what do you mean by "useful"?'

Well, what kind of a city is that where every one is feverishly active? Surely there must be idle men, if only for the benefit of the workers, for without contrast how may these latter know how busy they are? Lookers-on afford such contrast, and to this extent, at least, may be said to be employed in the public service.

The reason for our lack of benches is, doubtless, the dearth of public squares where benches may be put. Have you ever compared a map of a North American with one of a South American or Continental city? If so, you must have noted at once, in the former, the absence of those little

green dots — so generously sprinkled over either of the latter — which mean pleasant oases in the desert of workaday life: grass plots, fountains, trees, and benches for tired pedestrians, nurse-maids, and lookers-on at life. It is not strange that rubber heels should have been an American invention; that you will find a shoe-repairing shop in every block — often two or three in the same block — throughout American cities; that flat feet is so common an American malady. These facts are easily explained: city dwellers in the United States have very few places where they may sit down, out of doors, and once they have left their homes, offices, shops, or factories, they must remain on their feet, standing or walking until they enter them again. To be sure, most cities of any size have a park, sometimes two, but these are usually so far on the outskirts as to be available only for holiday or Sunday use.

I am convinced, too, that our lack of public benches explains the great popularity of the motion-picture theater. Some critics of our national life believe, or profess to believe, that we are all motion-picture mad. It is only in America, they say, that one sees such crowds of people, particularly of a morning, filing in and out of the picture theaters. That is true, but their deduc-

tion, that we are hopeless 'movie' addicts, is wrong. These morning crowds, and a large part of the afternoon ones, are composed of transients in the city. Their business done, they walk the streets until they are worn out, and then in sheer desperation, having no other choice, they enter either a motion-picture theater or a soft-drink emporium. Think of the crowds of people one sees at soda fountains, filling their stomachs at all hours of the day with horrible concoctions of ice cream and thick chocolate syrup. Not only the women — the men too. Do you suppose they do it willingly? You could never convince me of this. No, I believe that they visit the soda fountains for the same reason that they visit the picture shows — because they may sit down there and rest for a few minutes. The fact that they actually eat the messes put before them only proves that they are so physically exhausted as to be ignorant of what they are doing. I wish this matter might be put to the test. I wish that we Americans, so fond of 'drives,' would make a nation-wide drive for public squares and benches. If we did, I venture to predict that the movement would be opposed from the outset — ruthlessly and bitterly opposed — by the near and remote connections of the shoe and rubber-heel industries,

the near and remote connections of the motion-picture industry, the hosiery manufacturers, all the chain drugstores, and the chiropodists. You could count — to a man, of course — on the support of the members of my profession, but you are right in thinking that it would be of small value against such formidable opposition. We are notoriously unskilled in matters requiring action and organization, and I confess that what we mean by 'support' is merely looking on with approval while some one else does the work.

But once he is comfortably seated, a looker-on is not really an indolent man at all. I will tell you how you may distinguish one of them from a mere sitter-on-a-bench: by the alert, intelligent scrutiny he gives you as you pass his vantage point. Your eyes meet for only the fraction of a second, but that is long enough for you to have gained a distinct impression of this seeming idler. You move briskly on, resisting a desire to turn for a backward glance, and as long as an hour later, perhaps two or three hours later, you say to yourself, 'Now what was it about that man ——?' It was this — his undoubted interest in you as revealed by that fleeting glance. His was not the casual, incurious, rather hostile regard to which you are accustomed from strangers. A looker-on

is incurious about nothing and only nothing, and he has developed the faculty of bringing his attention and interest to focus instantly upon whomever or whatever meets his eye.

He is over-scrupulous, perhaps, about striking up chance acquaintanceships, and never does so of his own initiative. But if, instead of passing by, you had sat down on the bench he was occupying and had spoken to him, he would have responded at once. You comment upon the weather, it may be, but that subject doesn't hold you for long. Soon you are following one of a thousand by-paths leading away from it — so far and pleasantly away that when you next hear the clock at the city hall striking the hour, you realize with a shock that it is striking four instead of two as it should have done.

'Great Scott! Is it as late as that? I must be getting on!' you say. Or did you say it? If so, then I am afraid that you would never make a really successful looker-on.

Only a distinguished member of the profession could have held you thus for three hours, forgetting time and place and urgent matters of business. Such men understand to a nicety the laws of give and take so essential to all good talk, but their preference is for taking rather than

giving. They are the best listeners in the world, and their interest, as I have said, is genuine and of the purest kind. I often suspect that the ranks of the lookers-on, particularly in the higher grades, are recruited from men of wide social experience who have attended innumerable gatherings in polite society where people's interest in one another is so often merely simulated. They have known the feeling of desolation which is the result of such experience, and so they have taken to public-benching, realizing only by degrees what a splendid escape it offered them.

If its pleasures and advantages and the innumerable small adventures it provides by the way were more widely known, I believe there would be a large increase in membership in our profession. These adventures are as various as they are numerous; there seems to be no end to them. That is why public benchers are such contented men. They are collectors of a sort, and collectors of whatever sort are fortunate. Consider for a moment the collector of things — why is he never bored with life? Because he has the choice of two infallible methods of escape from boredom — in the contemplative reassortment of acquired treasures, or the eager pursuit of the yet-to-be-possessed. It matters little what the

particular bent may be, or what the value, in a worldly sense, of the collectanea. Once mounted, the rangiest Rosinante among collectors' hobbies will throw up its head with a whinny of joy and gallop off in pursuit of anything from a butterfly to a Renaissance bottle-stopper, carrying its master in a flash of time across a seemingly interminable stretch of arid hours or days, where the erstwhile scoffers at this sorry-looking nag are plodding wearily along on foot.

But the moment one possesses them, things have, of course, the limitations and the disadvantages of things. They may be lost, burnt, stolen, tarnished by time, and they are so many drags upon freedom of movement. Therefore it would seem wiser to collect something less tangible, as we public benchers do. We accumulate nothing but experience and fragments of experience. We have enormous collections, but in the spacious attic where old memories are stored there is ample room for everything, whether rubbish or golden treasure; and the best of it is that one carries it all about so easily. In comparison with one of us, the collector of postage stamps is weighted down with chains, old ships' anchors, and iron balls. There is, however, this disadvantage to our particular pursuit: the lack of guid-

ance, of knowledge how to go about it. I wish there were some good treatise on the art of collecting experience, with voluminous notes and appendices compiled from the views of the masters on the subject. But I see at once that such a work would be beyond the powers of the most patient, gifted, and healthy of mortals. It would exceed in scope the Encyclopædia Britannica, and were it twice its bulk in printed words, the net result would be no more than the illuminated initial letter of the first word on the subject. Yes, it is plain that such a task would be impossible of achievement. All the books ever written are but footnotes of varying significance to this great work which will never be written.

Lookers-on do not, of course, go forth to collect experience in the spirit of the collector of things. They merely take what comes by chance. As an illustration of the method, or rather, the lack of method, allow me to exhibit a small item from my own collection, and to tell how I came by it. I select this merely because it is a recent addition, picked up by chance in an American town a little to the west of the Middle West.

It was more than a town, in fact. It was fast becoming a city, with a population considerably beyond the one hundred thousand mark. I spent

a week there, and each day set out in a new direction in search of some place in the heart of the city where I might sit down out of doors. I found nothing but street after street after street of business blocks — department stores, five-and-ten-cent stores, garages, automobile-salesrooms, quick-lunch rooms, and picture theaters. Tired with so much walking I was about to enter a soft-drink establishment when I discovered, in one of the busiest streets, a bench undoubtedly intended for public use, but so well hidden that it had escaped my notice although I had passed that way before. Owing to a sharp diagonal twist in the street, there was a small, V-shaped niche between two tall buildings. In this was an ornamental, semi-circular stone seat large enough to accommodate three persons.

It was an ideal vantage point. The seat was at the small end of the V, and there, concealed from view, you could watch passers-by crossing the open end. You had but a brief glimpse of them as they passed, but the briefness was compensated for by the fact that they did not know they were being observed. Directly opposite, across the street, was a large department store, and adjoining it an hotel with the sign, 'The Kirkland,' over the entryway. In the other direction

you could see as far as the corner where a traffic policeman was standing by his GO-STOP signal.

I had this bench to myself for an afternoon, but the following morning I found an elderly man seated there — a tall, thin, hale-looking man with a white moustache and beard, shrewd, kindly blue eyes, and sunburned hands and face. I decided that he was a stranger in the city like myself. Indeed, he appeared to be a stranger in the century, too, not so much because of his age — although he was evidently in his late seventies — as by reason of the old-fashioned, wide-brimmed hat he held on his knees, the peculiar cut of his blue broadcloth coat, his elastic-sided, square-toed shoes. I had not seen shoes of that particular style and shape since childhood, and his cravat was of a kind my own great-grandfather used to wear, almost never met with in these days.

I halted upon seeing him there and was about to pass on when he moved to one side.

'Want to sit down?' he said. 'Plenty of room for two.'

I thanked him and did so, and when we had exchanged a few commonplace remarks he held out his hand and said, 'Kirkland's my name,' in the simple, friendly manner of the old-time Ameri-

can. I was flattered at this kindly overture from a man so much older, and introduced myself at once.

'You're not the owner of that hotel by any chance?' I asked.

He shook his head.

'No. I wish I was. But it was named for my father. He was one of the early settlers in this part of the country. I used to plough corn over there,' and he pointed across the street.

Had he said that he was the son of Miles Standish or Cotton Mather, or one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, the remark would have been but little more startling, and it would have seemed but little less credible. Despite its many modern buildings that city looked as though it had been there forever. Behind the windows of the department store across the street, wax ladies dressed in silk lingerie or flowered summer gowns, gazed archly out at the throng of passers-by. At the corner, the traffic policeman marshaled in orderly procession two endless streams of motor cars. There was no land anywhere, no green things growing except the potted palms in the hotel window. The very sky, dappled with neat orderly clouds, and the summer breeze blowing in faint warm gusts around

the corner, seemed, somehow, urban. It was hard to believe that all those tens of thousands of people, the millions of tons of steel and stone and wood — the pavements, curbstones, wires, street lamps, office buildings, hotels, motor cars, silk lingerie, tennis racquets, newspaper presses, platinum watches, fire engines, had flowed in, sorted themselves out, and gotten fashioned into a city in the space of one man's lifetime.

'Is that possible!' I said. 'How long ago was it?'

'I was just figuring it out this morning. Fifty-nine years. I haven't been back here in more than forty. We moved to the coast in eighty-one, and I've been living there ever since.'

He then went on to tell me of life in the village he had known half a century ago, and as I listened, I realized for the first time, in an emotional sense, that America is now a developed country. I had known this, mentally, for a long time, but the amazing, saddening fact had never before really come home to me. Looking into the face of this still vigorous old man, I had the feeling that this was one of the most memorable experiences of my life. It was as though I had seen, briefly and vividly, the boundary line between epoch and epoch which one had long felt was some-

where near. 'Perhaps never again,' I thought, 'will I have the privilege of talking with an American of the old pioneer tradition. A few years hence and the last of them will have gone.'

He spoke half humorously, half sadly, of his bewilderment, coming back to his boyhood haunts after so great a lapse of time, and finding everything so completely changed.

'You may wonder,' he said, 'how I know just where I used to plough corn. Well, I'll tell you. I've still got one small piece of land here, and I puzzled it out from the lay of that. There's nothing on that piece and never has been from the day of creation as far as I know. Would you like to see it? I think you'd be interested, and it's only about three blocks from where we're sitting.'

As we walked along he told me that his father had intended using this small plot as a family burying ground, but had changed his mind afterward. It had lain idle all these years. He had even forgotten that he owned it, and had learned, after he had moved on west, that the title was recorded in his father's name.

'I've just sold it; that's what I came back for. I sort of wish I'd known what was going to happen here. All our land was right where these big buildings are now. If I'd kept it instead of selling

out when I did — well, I reckon I could give you half a million dollars to-day, and hardly know the difference.'

We came to the place. There was a Merchants' National Bank Building on one side, and a large retail furniture store on the other. The lot was about fifteen paces wide and twice as deep, and was closed on the street side by two tiers of billboards. The sign on one of the boards read:

SEVEN THOUSAND MORE SINCE YESTERDAY — FORD

'You can peek in behind from this side,' he said. 'There's something you probably won't ever see again, young man — a piece of the real old prairie.'

The midday sun glanced briefly down upon one corner of it, lighting up pitilessly that bit of virgin soil which looked anything but virginal now. Nothing was growing there, not so much as a weed or a blade of grass. The ground looked sour and oily, and was littered with old brickbats and scraps of paper torn from the bill-boards. On the fragment of an ancient showbill were the words, COMING SOON. My companion smiled faintly as he pointed it out.

'I'll tell you what's coming soon — a five-story building, a Shops Building I think they call it. They're starting work on it next week. I remember the day my father fenced off this little piece. He cut the posts himself, down by the river. I was only a little shaver then — nine or ten years old. The grass was almost as high as my head. There was a hole in my pants pocket and I lost my jackknife. I tell you I was a sorry boy that day! I got down on my hands and knees and looked and looked but I never found it. Shouldn't wonder if it's there still, buried a little way down in the dirt.'

We stood at the curb for a moment, talking and watching the crowds.

'You know,' he said, 'it makes me feel as old as Time to see all this. Well, what next, I wonder?'

Across the street, a bullet-headed little Greek in a dirty apron was standing in a doorway, calling in a harsh, rasping voice, 'Shine! Shoe Polush, Shine!'

I recall in this connection another man met several years ago; for he too had something to show me — something, not reminiscent of the past, but big, he thought, with foreboding for the future.

On this occasion I was public benching for a

day in Central Park, New York. The following morning I was to sail for Iceland, and now, with all arrangements completed, I had gone to the park to enjoy, in such quiet as I could find, that greatest of all pleasures, the pleasure of anticipation.

This man was not a professional looker-on but a gifted amateur. He told me that he was a mining engineer, and had just returned to the United States after fifteen years in various South American countries.

'I'm going to Persia next month,' he said, 'and glad of it. I feel lost at home in these days. Life is nothing like it used to be. I wouldn't have believed that it could change so fast.'

What worried him chiefly was that women were taking such prominent parts in business, politics, and public affairs generally. In his opinion it was no longer a man's world.

'The strange thing is,' he added, 'that men at home don't seem to realize what's happening. They are in the midst of the greatest revolution the world has ever seen and they haven't an inkling of the fact. If they had, they'd fight it while there's still a chance.'

He drew his watch from his pocket.

'Four-fifteen. Are you busy for a few minutes?

If not, I'd like to show you something. This is just the right time.'

A looker-on, of course, is never busy, and I went with him willingly enough. Our destination was a large hotel near the park. He led me through an imposing lobby, up a marble staircase into an immense room with windows reaching from the floor nearly to the ceiling, and hung with crimson curtains. It was filled with women seated at little tables. An attendant came forward apprehensively when he saw us.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' he began, 'but this ——'

The engineer waved him aside.

'I know. We're not stopping. Just looking in for a moment.' Then, to me, 'Well, this is it.'

I looked at him questioningly.

'Good Lord, Man!' he said, 'aren't you frightened? You ought to be. This room, as I happen to know, has a seating capacity for a thousand people. There are at least eight hundred here now, every one of them women — eight hundred women having tea! Listen!'

I did, and whether or not he had momentarily infected me with the virus of his own fears, certainly that low, all-pervading hum of conversation did sound rather ominous. It reminded me,

somehow, of the continuous mutter of guns one heard in France, when marching from billets far in the rear to the firing line.

'This is something new,' he said. 'I've only been at home a month, but in that time I've been down South, in Boston, and as far west as Chicago. It's the same everywhere, gangs of women meeting like this. These are not old-fashioned social teas — don't you believe it! These women are plotting, and they're plotting against us. They mean to have control of things. It's time men were waking up to the fact. If they don't ——'

The implication was that we were done for, and would have to move somewhere else and start a new world of our own. There was nothing in the least jocular in his manner. He was deeply serious. We parted a moment later. And I watched him swinging off down the avenue in the direction of the Grand Central Terminal. I don't even know his name, but I've often thought of him, and whenever I read of a woman being elected governor, or mayor, or a member of Congress, or to the judicial bench, I see him in the mind's eye, standing in that spacious room, crushing a pearl-gray felt hat in his fingers, and saying in a voice both incredulous and monitory, 'Eight hun-dred women having tea!'

There was nothing I could have done to prevent them having it even if I had wanted to, so I sailed for Iceland the following day as I had planned. You may think Iceland a strange country for a looker-on to visit; therefore it is well to explain that public benchers, more than other men, perhaps, need an occasional revivifying bath of solitude. Furthermore, change is as necessary to them as breathing. Often, without the slightest warning, they are seized with a pang of longing for new horizons; and it is more than a pang, for it remains, growing in intensity until they can endure it no longer. So it was with me in this instance. I had been reading a book — nothing about Iceland, but the name happened to be mentioned there, and at once a vision of the country rose up before me as though I had known and loved it in some previous existence. I seemed to be gazing toward it from afar. The sea was in between, calm and mirrorlike, and the shadow of the land stretched far out over it. Everything was in the clearest outline — the mountains, the deep blue shadows in the valleys and ravines, the walls of precipices falling sheer to the water's edge, and the silvery gleam of the glaciers winding down from the interior. I knew at once that I must go to Iceland, that I would go there, and curiously

enough, it never even occurred to me to wonder whether I should find public benches to sit on.

As a matter of fact I didn't find them — at least none of the usual kind. But Icelanders have benches which are a great improvement upon those of most other countries. They are ambulatory, and the moment you are seated, away goes the bench with you on it, through wide meadowlands, over the moorlands dappled with cloud shadows, across vast stretches of desert country, up the steep slopes of mountains, and over the windy passes between valley and valley; and at night it stops of its own accord at some lonely farmhouse which you first saw hours ago and miles and miles distant. Then, having supped, you sleep dreamlessly on a bed of down, actually of down — eider down; and the following morning you are away again when the eastern sky gives only a faint cold promise of the splendor to come.

'What sort of benches are these?' you may ask.

Iceland ponies, the finest benches in the world — comfortable, adaptable, fast moving or slow, as you choose — everything that a bench should be. I sat on various ones during the late summer and the autumn and winter of 1922–23, and looked on at life while they were carrying me, in all, something over five hundred miles.

Thoreau, in 'Walden,' says, 'It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts.'

In my opinion there is not a word of truth in this grandiose statement, and the proof that Thoreau did not believe in this highest of arts — at least that he made no attempt to practice it — is to be found in his own book. Its beauty and charm lie in the fact that he was as passively receptive to the quality of the day as Walden Pond itself. And so, I believe, should all men be, whether sojourners, or travelers, at home or abroad. Their minds should lie fallow both to the quality of the day and to the quality and character of the country where the day breaks or wanes to its close; and I can think of no land where this attitude of placid acceptance will pay richer returns than in Iceland.

Surely there is no other country where one may have a more refreshing bath of solitude. And the flavor of melancholy in that inviolate and inviolable land is to the spiritual palate like the tart autumnal flavor of wild grapes to the physi-

cal one. Never elsewhere have I so richly enjoyed being sad. There was nothing of gloom or depression in the feeling. It was not a human kind of sadness, but a cosmic melancholy drawn from mountains and stones, from lakes and fjords, born of the sound of great rivers, of the thunder of mighty waterfalls, of the moaning of the sea around desolate headlands, of the deep, vibrant hum of the wind blowing from the fastnesses of the North. It was as fragrant as the odor of blue distance, and it sank deeply into the heart, for it was, in truth, an emanation from the land itself.

The lightest part of my baggage during this time was my knowledge of Icelandic. Many people believe that neither pleasure nor profit is to be derived from foreign travel unless one has at least a fair knowledge of the speech of the country or countries one is to visit. This, I think, is a mistaken opinion. Certainly public benchers do not hold it, for their favorite song is 'Over the Hills and Far Away,' and not many of them are so fortunate as to have a Borrovian facility for acquiring languages. Life is short, and the world a mosaic composed of stones from the Tower of Babel, and if we are to wait until we have made suitable preparation before visiting the countries we wish to see, most of us must stay at home for-

ever. The fact that one must be silent while traveling, or partially so, has its advantages. One has more leisure for observation, for absorbing and brooding upon visual impressions; and the tongue, spared the fatiguing necessity of speech, performs its other function all the more suitably. Gustatory adventures in strange lands are by no means to be despised; indeed, they may be quite as interesting as other kinds, and one has the free mind to enjoy them when not preoccupied, as travelers so often are, with talking, with trying to understand and to be understood. In Iceland I wandered thus among meats and drinks, soups and sauces, in all parts of the country, and as a result of the experience I could write, wholly from silent observation, an illuminating essay on the subject of the Icelandic cuisine, interspersed with an occasional lyric poem whenever a particular dish, such as *skyr*, demanded this nobler treatment.

I reaped yet another advantage from my ignorance of the language. Having little knowledge of the meaning of words, I gave myself up to the enjoyment of the sound of them. This was an absorbing pastime; I had never before realized how much pleasure may be derived from it. One seems to partake of the emotions of the makers of lan-

guage, and to catch an occasional audible glimpse of crude ancestral sounds as they were before they came to be definitely related to things and ideas. And I made a curious discovery — unfortunately, one of those quite useless discoveries so often made by members of my profession. It was this: that speech divorced from meaning has a meaning of its own. I could write another essay on this subject, and one chapter of it would deal with the pictorial qualities of words considered purely as sound. When I first heard Icelandic spoken I was reminded of decorations I had seen in museums on Aztec pottery. I would like, at this point, in my capacity of philologist, to take exception to the statement frequently made, that Icelandic is an unmusical language. It is as beautiful to hear as the land where it is spoken is to see, and I can think of no higher terms in which to praise it. Where, for example, could you find a lovelier little poem than this: *Vitid per hvad klukkan er?* — phonetically, Vitith thier qvath klukkan ere. I remember my surprise upon learning that it means, merely, 'Do you know what time it is?'

Time — the sound of the word, in English, tolls me out of these reflections, and I am carried, like

a chip on the backwash of a wave, from Iceland to Tahiti, and cast up high and dry on the present moment. I have wasted a whole morning — several mornings, in fact — indoors, prattling of my profession instead of practicing it. But midday remains to me, and at Tahiti that is a pleasant time to be abroad.

I love the hour between twelve and one when this little island world falls under the enchantment of silence and sleep; but having been born and bred in cooler latitudes, I can't accustom myself to the siesta. Sleep fails to come, and so, with a book in my pocket I usually set out for a stroll through the deserted streets.

But my own wakefulness is only seeming. I too am under the noonday enchantment which plays curious pranks with the senses, giving to each of them the qualities of all the others; and when a mynah bird, hidden in the deep shade of a mango tree, drops a single drowsy chirp into the pool of silence beneath him, I see the silver splash it makes, and the circles moving smoothly outward over the placid surface. And I hear, as distinctly, the barbaric music of color which comes from every roadside garden: the chiming of innumerable hibiscus bells; the clamorous trumpet tones of the bougainvillæa; flamboyant trees

yearning like saxophones, and modest blossoms deeply embowered in greenish gloom, giving forth arpeggios of cool tones like the tinkling of mandolins or the plucked strings of violins.

For all this weird music, I am aware of the deepening noonday stillness. The bell in the cathedral clock-tower, striking the quarter-past, tries vainly to fathom it, and wider and deeper yet is the sea silence. I realize now that the faint thunder of the surf on the reef is really a part of this silence, thus perpetually self-conscious, aware of its own immensity.

The sunlight, too, has a peculiar noonday quality. It is heavy, amenable to the law of gravity. It drips from the fronds of the palms, spills in rivulets from broad-leaved banana trees, and runs in bright drops down the stems of the grasses. It falls like golden rain in the open spaces, and lies on the streets in shining pools to be splashed through by midday sleep-walkers. As for the shadows, they are more palpable still. I expect to be enmeshed in the lacy shadow pattern of an acacia tree thrown across the roadway, and come with a perceptible shock against the cool, clear-cut edges of house shadows. 'If I were fully awake,' I think, 'I could lean against one of these and rest a while.'

In this trancelike mood I move on through numerous back streets and come at last to the water-front. The silence here is broken only by the faint creaking of the gangplanks of schooners moored along the sea-wall. A few Chinese fruit vendors sit in the shade of their booths, their eyes closed, their chins resting on their updrawn knees; but as I pass, each of them opens an eye to a barely perceptible width, and the keen appraisement of these brief glances convinces me that sleep to a Chinaman is merely another form of wakefulness. Not so do the Polynesians enjoy their siesta. They lie sprawled on the decks of the schooners, under the trees, in the porches of the closed shops — wherever shade is to be found, and they are as nearly dead as sleeping men can be.

At such times it seems that the world is, in truth, under a spell, a perpetual enchantment, and that I alone am left with limitless leisure, now, for the practice of my profession. So I choose a bench in a shady spot, sit down, and fall agreeably to work.

THE END

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